WOMEN'S NETWORKS IN NORTHERN ENGLAND 1600 -1725

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ABSTRACT
Women's Networks in Northern England 1600-1725
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This research fills a gap in seventeenth century English social history. In studies of the early modern period, women are generally situated within the formal structures of marriage and the family, where their relationship to the masculine is the defining feature of their position. This thesis examines women's relationships with other women operating outside the expected range of relationships and look at groupings that were not based around the formal social structure of the time. It demonstrates that women in early modern England created and used networks which provided functions beyond their maternal and familial obligations. It also shows that these networks had an impact on wider society, inspiring strong reactions from both supporters and detractors.

This study provides a functional, descriptive and developmental analysis of women's networks and locates their sphere of influence within early modern society. It asks questions about the different types of women's networks that existed in the early modern period, how they were organised and what environmental conditions helped to create them. It looks at the individuals who made up the networks and what effect age, social and marital status and religion had on the form and nature of these networks. It examines the impact of the networks on the women and what effect opposition had on them and on their networks. The research also questions whether women were conscious of their networks; if they were able to recognise their potential power and ability to influence events in their communities. The period considered by the thesis includes significant developments in the organisation of women's networks and it therefore also examines why a number of them chose to become formally organised and officially recognised during the seventeenth century.

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Abbreviations

BL British Library

BC Bar Convent

EEB Early English Books 1640-1700

EB English Books before 1640

FL Society of Friends Library

IBVM Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary

KRO Kendal Record Office

MF Microfilm

PMLA Periodical of the Modern Language Society of America

TT Thomason Tracts

T&W Tyne and Wear Archives

WI Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine

Wing Wing, Donald, Short Title Catalogue of Books 1641-1700,(New York: 1945-51)

Chapter 1
Introduction

This research fills a gap in seventeenth century English social history. Whilst historians have succeeded in giving a good account most of the major social structures in early modern England, the existence of women's networks have been until recently, almost completely overlooked. In studies of the early modern period, women are generally situated within the formal structures of marriage and the family, where their relationship to the masculine is the defining feature of their position. This thesis will examine women's relationships with other women operating outside the expected range of relationships and look at groupings that were not based around the formal social structure of the time.

For the purposes of this study, women's networks consisted of social relationships between women only that used strategies such as reciprocity, exchange and honour to provide alternative power structures for those who were denied official influence within the legal and cultural practices of the period. This thesis will show that women's relationships with each other had a purpose beyond the socially accepted idea of recreation by providing support, creating a fictive kinship and enabling women to subvert and influence events far outside of their capacity as individual women. This thesis will demonstrate that women in early modern England created and used networks which provided functions beyond their

maternal and familial obligations. Some women rejected marriage and the family altogether in favour of female networks which offered them a measure of autonomy, while others used their networks to negotiate an improved position for themselves within their societies. These networks were generally consensual and non-hierarchical, providing an alternative to the formal systems of state and family in which women were expected to play a subordinate role. It will also show that these networks had an impact on wider society, inspiring strong reactions from both supporters and detractors.

This study will describe the membership, development and function of women's networks and locate their sphere of influence within early modern society. It asks questions about the different types of women's networks that existed in the early modern period, how they were organised and what environmental conditions helped to create them. It looks at the individuals who made up the networks and what effect age, social and marital status and religion had on the form and nature of these networks. It will examine the impact of the networks on the women and what effect opposition had on them and on their networks. The research also questions whether women were conscious of their networks; if they able to recognise their potential power and ability to influence events in their communities. The period considered by the thesis includes significant developments in the organisation of

women's networks and it therefore also examines why a number of them chose to become formally organised and officially recognised during the seventeenth century.

Historical research concentrating on women has a long tradition. Texts from the early part of the twentieth century by Ivy Pinchbeck[1] and Alice Clark[2] are relatively well known, but there were also other female authors writing about women in history who are less celebrated[3]. There was an upsurge in research into women's history in the 1960s which followed on from the work of Sheila Rowbotham[4], Sally Alexander[5] and others. Initially, most studies of women in history concentrated on the lives of extraordinary or exemplary women. This was then broadened to look at the everyday lives of women in previous centuries, but women's history still tended to look for female influence and activity in official structures such as the church, legal and state institutions. The general failure to find significant evidence of female involvement and success in these areas in the early modern period has often led

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[1] I. Pinchbeck, Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, original publication 1930, (London: Virago, 1975).
[2] A. Clark, Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century, (London: Routledge, 1919).
[3] For example, M. Phillips and W.S. Tomkinson, English Women in Life and Letters, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926) draws on an impressive variety of sources to give an account of women's lives from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Other women also documented the lives of particular women, such as E. Manners, Elizabeth Hooten: First Woman Quaker Preacher 1600-1672, (London: Headley Bros., 1914). M.C.E. Chambers' biography of Mary Ward deserves mention for its attention to detail and excellent use of primary source material, The Life of Mary Ward, Volumes I & II, (London: Burns & Oates, 1882).
[4] S. Rowbotham, Hidden From History, (London: Pluto Press, 1973), J. Kelly, Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). I. Grundy, Women, Writing, History: 1640-1799, (London: Batsford, 1992) analyses the way in which a number of female authors wrote histories at this time.
[5] S. Alexander, 'Women's Work in Nineteenth Century London: A Study of the Years 1820-50', in J. Mitchell and A. Oakley, editors., The Rights and Wrongs of Women, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976).

historians to the conclusion that women were excluded by law or culture and had limited influence in the running of their societies. Success for women, however, is generally defined by and measured against the achievements of men, therefore the use of the same criteria has the effect of excluding most women even from consideration. Laurence has highlighted the difficulties created by historians using their own concerns with contemporary issues to view the past. Feminist historians in the 1970s and 1980s set out an agenda of issues they felt needed to be addressed:

> patriarchy; nature and perceptions of nature; women's work and the reliance of women on waged labour; and the exploitation of women by manufacturing industry - concerns central to the study of women in a modern industrialized society[6].

Differences in the structure and organisation of society in the early modern period mean that these issues, although not unimportant, would appear to have less significance then than they do to the modern era. Although they were not totally irrelevant to the early modern period, these concerns were less representative of the challenges facing women at this time, as waged labour and manufacturing industries were part of a minority experience, particularly in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Social history has attempted to provide a history of social structure and to probe the dynamics of evolving societies by looking at the changes within those

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[6] A. Laurence, Women in England 1500-1760: A Social History, (London: Weidenfeld& Nicholson, 1994), p.4.

structures[7]. Women were generally consigned to the realms of ordinary daily life (although a detailed examination of many women's lives at this time generally fails to find one who was "ordinary") which was felt to be less dynamic or interesting. Most social history of the early modern period has concentrated on the formal institutions of family, church and state, which provided the main basis of society in the early modern period. It is important that care is taken when approaching the state and the family at this time however, as they differed markedly from the same institutions in later centuries. Defining the state and how it operated in the pre-industrial period is a different proposition altogether to the same activity relating to the nineteenth or twentieth- century. Historian's views of the state, its functions and relationship to power and the people have varied greatly.

Early Whig and Marxist narratives highlighted the political crises of the seventeenth-century, in particular the Civil War and the political events of 1688-9. They were interested in explaining how decisions were made, legislation enacted and the tensions that led to changes in political structure. In more recent political histories, political dysfunction, structural failure and incapacity were suggested as explanations for conflict, unrest and revolt[8]. Social historians of the seventeenth century have often made reference to the part played by "the state" in areas such as

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[7] K. Wrightson, English Society 1580-1680(London: Hutchinson, 1982)), J.A. Sharpe, Early Modern England: A Social History,(London: Edward Arnold, 1987).

crime, witchcraft, social regulation and changes in perceptions of morality. These social histories and localised studies have been generally concerned with the actual effect of state authority on communities and the way in which it was exercised on a local level[9].

When considering changes or development of the state, conclusions seem to vary depending on assumptions about what the state actually consists of. In many political histories, highlighting changes in fiscal-military effectiveness emphasised the importance of bureaucracy and domestic governance and social interest had a minimal effect[10]. Social histories have generally concentrated on domestic functions of the state that are performed by local people. These functions were very closely tied to the social interests of people in positions of authority in the local area. For example, the magistrate for a particular village might also be the major landowner and also a church officer. Therefore in practical terms it would be difficult to present the state as an autonomous entity, distinct from society or community. Braddick defines the state as:

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[8] A. Hughes, The Causes of the English Civil War, (London: MacMillan, 1998), C. Russell, The Causes of the English Civil War, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) J. Morrill, Revolt in the Provinces: The People of England and the Tragedies of War 1630-1648,(London: Longman, 1999).

[9] S. Hindle, P. Griffiths et al, editors, The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England, (London: MacMillan, 1996), K. Wrightson, and D. Levine, Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling 1525-1700, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), S. Hindle, The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), V.A.C. Gatrell, B. Lenman, G. Parker, editors, Crime and the Law: A Social History of Crime in Western Europe Since 1500, (London: Europa, 1980), G. Morgan and P. Rushton, Rogues, Thieves and the Rule of Law, (London: UCL Press, 1998).

[10] J. Brewer, War, Money and the English State, (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), C. Tilly, Coercion, Capital and European States AD 990-1992, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

> a co-ordinated and territorially bounded network of agents exercising political power....The state is a network of agencies distinguished by the kind of power that they exercise, rather than the precise form of these agencies[11]

This analysis of the development of political power demonstrates a change in the way that the early modern English state has been viewed by historians. Political power could be seen to reside in offices not individual people. Offices were defined in terms of specific functions, but the authority to perform the functions attributed to the office came from a central point. Specifically, analysis of the early modern state looks at 'the impersonal forces which shape the uses of political power rather than the purposeful actions of individuals or groups'[12]. This study is particularly interested in the way that this state authority was used and the effect it had on individual women and their networks.

Initial research looked at whether women's groups and networks were alternatives to the family. It concluded that, as the family is the social unit most studied in pre-industrial Europe, the importance of support groups is often overlooked. One of the reasons for this is that many groups offering to support individuals worked within the family structure, therefore boundaries were not easily defined. It is also often assumed that the family itself was the primary support for the individuals within it and anything external would be of limited influence. The history

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[11] Braddick, p. 6.
[12] M.J. Braddick, State Formation in Early Modern England, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

of the family has been a focus for much debate, from the dispelling of initial assumptions about age at marriage and numbers of children to the controversy over Stone's ideas about affective marriage and attitudes towards children and childhood[13]. Discussion of these issues has been characterised by polarity and opposition. Therefore the family was presented as either extended or nuclear, formal or affective, primitive or modern[14]. Throughout much of this debate assumptions about what "family" actually consisted of were rarely challenged. In an attempt to address this issue, Tadmor's recent exploration of the nature of family states that concepts of the family:

> must inevitably branch from relationships of blood and marriage to other social ties...the boundaries between familial and non-familial ties ...were different then and now[15]

Tadmor's analysed the limits of family by tracing the language they used and this brought her to the conclusion that the definition of "family" was flexible and permeable. It was not fixed by lineage, ancestry or kin. Close study of what "family"

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[13] For example, P. Laslett, Characteristics of the Western Family considered over time', Journal of Family History 23 1977, B. Reay, 'Kinship and neighbourhood in nineteenth-century rural England: the myth of the autonomous nuclear family' Journal of Family History 21 1996, E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, The Population History of England, 1541-1871: A Reconstruction, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), M. Chaytor, 'Household and kinship: Ryton in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries' History Workshop Journal 12 1981, L. Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England1500-1800, (London: Penguin, 1977), P. Aries, Centuries of Childhood, (1962).

[14] R. Wall, J. Robin and P. Laslett, Family Forms in Historic Europe, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), R. Houlbrooke, The English Family, (London: Longman, 1984), R. O'Day, The Family and Family Relationships, (Basingstoke: Longman, 1994), J.L. Flandrin, Families in Former Times, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

45 N. Tadmor, Family and Friends in Eighteenth Century England, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p. 10.

meant to those who wrote about it has shown that it generally comprised 'related and non-related dependents living together under the authority of a householder'[16]. She also discovered that 'near and distant kin acted as "friends", as well as non-related employers, patrons, neighbours and intimate personal companions'[17]. In both family and friendship relationships kinship ties were important, but neither corresponded precisely to any ties of blood or marriage.

Work on friendship systems has presented them as relationships made up of informal rules and boundaries, functioning most effectively when those participating adhered to codes of reciprocity and etiquette. These informal social rules can be seen to underpin that legislation which aimed to maintain order within society. This idea is increased in significance when it is applied to a society such as early modern England, which was just beginning to develop more formal methods of social organisation. The analysis of social organisation into formal and informal structures has been fully explored by Laguerre[18], but it has not been applied in historical research. The historical study of popular culture in early modern Europe provides a number of examples which can illustrate Laguerre's thesis that formal and informal systems do not oppose each other, but they work towards the same ends as part of a continuum[19]. Natalie Zemon Davis' work on the 'Abbeys of Misrule' has discussed

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[16] Tadmor, p. 272.
[17] Tadmor, p. 272
[18] M. S. Laguerre, The Informal City, (London: MacMillan, 1994).
[19] This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

the way in which authority could be inverted in French popular culture[20]. Non-religious elements were often included in church ceremonies as a way of retaining the focus on the religious festival without alienating those for whom traditional or folk rituals held a great deal of meaning. The activities of the people during festivals, charivari and carnival provided an opportunity for the popular or informal regimes of authority to be identified and explored, but they operated with the permission and within the confines of the formal system of church and government. Both structures worked towards the same aim, that of maintaining social order.

O'Connor's overview of theories of friendship as they relate to women has provided a critique of the work done on the structure, function and importance of female friendships[21]. She has identified many of the most relevant methodological approaches and presented friendship as a codified social system. Some research has been completed on women's friendships in early modern England, but this has generally been focused on literature.

The existence of women's networks and patronage in the production of literature was vitally important in the seventeenth century and they can be identified in letters, dedications, epistles and prologues. Women often came together to read, write and discuss their ideas, passing on their writings and giving each other

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[20] N.Z. Davis, 'The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth Century France', Past and Present *Volume 50 1970. See also, Davis,* Society and Culture in Early Modern France, *(London: Duckworth,* 1975).

feedback about their work[22]. The existence of a tradition of female writing was recognised and acknowledged as an important factor by the women writers themselves. Most of this writing was produced and circulated in manuscript form making it less easy for the historian to identify, but at this time a very legitimate way of placing writing in the public arena[23].

Women's writing to each other in the form of poetry, letters and dedications has been used to discuss ideas about the existence, or absence, of lesbian relationships at this time. Faderman's survey of homosexual women in history includes a chapter on 'romantic friendship' in mainly eighteenth-century texts[24]. In the search for evidence of lesbian activity, the idea and function of friendship has been often overlooked or interpreted as the 'erotically charged poetry of intimacy'[25]. While it does not dismiss the idea of erotic relationships between female friends at this time, this thesis intends to concentrate on those friendships which are not ambiguous in this respect.

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[21] P. O'Connor, Friendships Between Women: A Critical Review, (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992).
[22] S. H. Myers, The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship and the Life of the mind in Eighteenth Century England, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).
[23] Manuscript circulation within personal networks is discussed in J. Scott-Warren, 'Reconstructing Manuscript Networks: the Textual Transactions of Sir Stephen Powle' in A. Shepard and P. Withington, editors, Communities in Early Modern England, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
[24] L. Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men, (New York: Morrow, 1981).
[25] H. Andreadis, 'The Erotics of Female Friendship in Early Modern England', in Frye, p.245.

Early modern society was undoubtedly patriarchal and the official, public world was dominated by men. However, to accept this male dominance without question and place our view of historical events only within this framework would give a very narrow view of the period. This thesis intends to widen the scope of what should be included in the study of social structures. Until recently, it has not generally been recognised that there were both formal and informal women's networks which existed alongside these other social structures. An essay by Capp has provided a general discussion of women's networks in this period with relevance to their attitude to authority.[26] Publications by Morgan[27] and Cowan[28] have briefly discussed women's networks in relation to crime in northern England and urban Europe, respectively. Morgan pointed to the possibility of female criminal networks, but she has not found sufficient evidence in the court records of north-east England to make a convincing case. However, the increase in studies on women's activities in the last thirty years has provided material in which networks can be identified. A number of studies which look in detail at specific women or events have provided excellent comparative material when looking at personal networks. Cohen and Cohen's study of a Roman household[29] exposed social networks of the wife, Giuila,

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[26] B. Capp, 'Separate Domains? Women and Authority in Early Modern England', in Griffiths et al, The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England, (London: Macmillan, 1996) pp.117-145.
[27] G. Morgan, and P. Rushton, Rogues, Thieves and the Rule of Law, (London: UCL press, 1998), pp. 110-112.
[28] A. Cowan, Urban Europe, (London: Edward Arnold, 1998) pp.79-82.
[29] E.S. and T. V. Cohen, 'Camilla the Go-Between; the politics of gender in a Roman household', Continuity and Change Volume 4 (1) 1989.

that she was able to use to great effect in her efforts to undermine her husband. Karant-Nunn's examination of the effects of the Reformation on the women of Zwickau identified a group of former nuns who refused to be separated and continued to live together after the closure of their convent[30].

Cavallo and Warner's[31] collection of essays on widowhood in medieval and early modern Europe provides an opportunity to examine in detail the life of women without men. The different approaches of men and women to widowhood, as well as the attitude of society towards them are explored in these essays and a number of them have pointed either directly or indirectly to women's use of informal networks to balance the power of official patriarchal structures. Pelling's study of widowers in England suggests that there is evidence of a 'studied avoidance of being alone'[32] (ie, without a spouse) by this group, a phenomenon not generally found amongst women in similar circumstances. Women were often found in households 'involving such combinations as two unrelated widows, or a mother and a deserted daughter'[33]. Foyster's examination of male perspectives on the remarrying widow in the same volume discussed 'the network of friends, kin, children and even servants'[34] that

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[30] S.C. Karant-Nunn, 'Continuity and Change: Some Effects of the Reformation on the Women of Zwickau', Sixteenth Century Journal, Volume 12 (2) 1982.
[31] S. Cavallo and L. Warner, editors, Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe, (Harlow: Pearson Education, 1999).
[32] M. Pelling, 'Finding Widowers: Men Without Women in English Towns before 1700', in Cavallo and Warner, p.48.
[33] Pelling, p.51
[34] E. Foyster, 'Marrying the Experienced Widow in Early Modern England: A Male Perspective', in Cavallo and Warner, p.119.

could be called upon to help a woman who was experiencing difficulties in a second marriage. In a study of domestic violence in the eighteenth century, Hunt has asserted that:

> for women, embededness in a community of friends, neighbours, relatives and workmates was the most effective way to counter-balance the overwhelming power of men, both in the family and in society.[35]

Fildes' collection of essays on motherhood in pre-industrial England[36] also contains references to women's networks, their uses, and where they were likely to have been found. Wilson's consideration of the interpretation of childbirth ceremonies includes analysis of the birth as a 'collective female space, constituted on the one hand by the presence of gossips and midwife, and on the other hand by the absence of men'[37].

Other recent publications have taken into consideration the informal influence of women outside of the official institutions. Gowing[38] has considered the power of female speech by looking at slander cases and Houlbrooke's much earlier study of women's common social action showed the impact that female solidarity could have

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[35] M. Hunt, 'Wife Beating, Domesticity and Women's Independence in Eighteenth Century London', Gender and History *Volume 4 1992*, p.23.
[36] V. Fildes, Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England, (London: Routledge, 1990).
[37] A. Wilson, *'The Ceremony of Childbirth and its Interpretation'* in Fildes, Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England. Childbed ceremonies are also considered in D. Cressey, Birth Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[38] L. Gowing, 'Language, Power and the Law: Women and Slander Litigation in Early Modern London', in J. Kermode and G. Walker, Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England,

on local government[39]. Lewalski's analysis of female influence in the Jacobean Court has identified the extent of women's unofficial power at the highest political level in early modern England[40].

In her article on Protestant nunneries, Bridget Hill outlined a number of female communities and she felt that the existence of such households pointed to 'an implied criticism of marriage and the real lack of any alternative to it'[41]. A number of formal organisations did emerge throughout the seventeenth century and Hill has suggested that: 'the idea of a Protestant nunnery goes through something of a renaissance in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries'[42]. However, the reality of a Protestant nunnery was slow to materialise and the reasons for this are discussed in Chapter 6 when considering ideas about women's networks and communities.

In *The Usurer's Daughter*, Hutson looked at the way in which women were used as capital in the transactions of men in drama written by male authors of the sixteenth century[43]. She asserted that, in their writing, men used their friendship networks to exclude and marginalise women. She used male-authored texts to

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(London: UCL press, 1994), pp.26-47. Also, Gowing, 'Women, Status and the Popular Culture of Dishonour', TRHS series 6, 1996.

[39] R. Houlbrooke, 'Women's Social Life and Common Action in England from the Fifteenth Century to the Eve of Civil War', Continuity and Change Volume 1 no. 2 1986.

[40] B. Lewalski, Writing Women in Jacobean England, (London: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[41] B. Hill, 'A Refuge From Men: The Idea of a Protestant Nunnery', Past and Present no. 117 1987, p.115.

[42] Hill, p.115.

[43] L. Hutson, The Usurer's Daughter, (London: Routledge, 1994).

illustrate this and to discuss women's importance as "signs" of credit between men in alliance formation. Women were the 'most precious of gifts'[44], but were nonetheless currency in the exchanges of men. The emphasis on men's texts and the writing of the male elite in this study has the effect of reducing female characters to the status of material items and robs them of any idea of power or self-advocacy. It also takes male authority for granted and accepts a masculine view that sees the exercise of power by women as manipulative, disruptive, illegitimate, or unimportant. This thesis challenges this by using the female author's portrayal of women as a counter to the assumptions of mainstream society.

Both Hutson and Sedgewick[45] have studied the representations of women in literature, but through the eyes of men and the authority that they are gifted by society. Women in male-authored texts of the early modern period are generally isolated and the way in which they are studied further singles them out as examples of particular female incarnations. Chapter 6 intends to move the focus onto the women in early modern texts and look at the links between them, how they interact and the effect of their agency on the rest of the text. Although it is not an exercise in comparative analysis, it will also consider the differences between the portrayal of women's networks in fiction by male and female authors of this time.

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[44] Quote from Gayle Rubin, in Hutson, p.7.
[45] E. K. Sedgewick, Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

D'Monte and Pohl have collected a number of essays which examine texts about female communities in early modern women's writing[46]. Hobby's discussion of seventeenth-century radical sects suggests that the hundreds of women who became preachers at this time formed a 'community of thinkers...an actual community as they became part of the body of Christ, God's chosen people'[47]. Published in 2000, after the substantive work of this thesis was complete, this essay and others in the collection, explores ideas of a dialogue between literary visions of female communities and women's attempts to create real communities in early modern England. The interdisciplinary nature of this project allows further development of a new area of literary criticism.

A very recent collection of essays, edited by Susan Frye[48], has drawn together many different examples of women's alliances. The variety and diversity of communities and relationships in the essays is illustrative the complex nature of women's networks. Although the study of female alliances is to be welcomed, the inclusion of so many differing approaches discourages consideration of the subject as a whole. The studies are divided into four sections: alliances in the city; alliances in the household; materializing communities; and, emerging alliances. This

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[46] R. D'Monte and N. Pohl, editors, Female Communities 1600-1800: Literary Visions and Cultural Realities, (London: MacMillan Press, 2000).
[47] E. Hobby, "Come to Live a Preaching Life': Female Community in Seventeenth-Century Radical Sects', in D'Monte and Pohl, p. 76.
[48] S. Frye, et al, editors, Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England, (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1999).

subdivision may have been an attempt by the editors to try to impose some cohesion on such a wide range of subjects and theoretical approaches. Although the essays all have women's alliances as a common link, unfortunately the 'startling array of theoretical approaches, textual sources and material culture'[49] prevent it from being read as a coherent analysis of the subject. The essays use a wide variety of theories including many of those popular in current trends in literary scholarship: historicism, cultural theory, postcolonialism, Marxism and queer theory are all applied to early modern cultural items and texts. They explore the different types of women's networks which can be identified by examining cultural artefacts and take into account the implications of this thesis. The collection includes many essays that are interesting in their own right, but as a body of work they are too diverse to be able to draw any firm conclusions about the nature of women's networks. This thesis intends to provide a structure that can be applied to specific women's networks and used as a tool for a comparative analysis.

A number of the essays in *Maids and Mistresses* are relevant to the subject matter of this study. Karen Robertson has detailed the sixteenth-century case of Lady Ralegh. She identified Lady Ralegh's connections with other women by tracing

[49] A.G. Bennett, 'Review Article: Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens by Frye and Robertson' Sixteenth Century Journal Volume 2000 p.879.

the women who signed the back of a letter giving their support when her husband was imprisoned[50]. Robertson has suggested that:

> Letters such as the one sent by Elizabeth Ralegh demonstrate women's active and co-operative opposition to the legal operations of primogeniture and inheritance. The women who endorsed Elizabeth Ralegh's plea seem to be responding to perceived parallels between her economic vulnerability and their own[51]

She noted that the names have not received any attention from the editor of Ralegh's letters. This oversight omitted a significant aspect of Lady Ralegh's life and ignored the fact that 'women were aware of and could turn to kinship alliances constructed through the female line'[52],. However, the evidence for this network is light, consisting only of the names on one letter added at a different time to the initial correspondence. Robertson seems to recognise the need for the firmer methodological approach that this thesis will provide, as she asks: 'If this list records women who supported Elizabeth Ralegh...how and why [did] such links operate?'[53]

In the same volume, Susan Frye's analysis of the political statements made by women in their needlework is an imaginative example of women's communication through a medium which was very much their own. Sewing as a communal female

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[50] Robertson has noted the parallels between the case of Lady Ralegh and Lady Anne Clifford, whose personal networks are studied in Chapter 3.
[51] K. Robertson, 'Tracing Women's Connections from a Letter by Elizabeth Ralegh' in Frye, Maids and Mistresses, p.153.
[52] Robertson, p. 160.
[53] Robertson, p. 160

activity will be considered in this thesis in Chapter 4 by looking at the way that female family and religious histories were transmitted through the generations. Frye has suggested that: 'women's domestic needlework...reveals political and imaginative connections among women'[54]. However, her essay does not identify actual alliances, but those that women are thought to have imagined and expressed in their needlework. Although it highlights a particularly neglected area of female activity, in common with many of the other contributors to this volume Frye does not engage fully with questions about how much:

> these fictional works reveal actual women's alliances and to what extent may these alliances be little more than the expression of the hopes and fears of the authors?[55].

In her afterword to *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens*, Jean E. Howard has criticised the 'one-way thoroughfare'[56] between the literary and historical disciplines. In its interdisciplinary approach, this study will provide a model that can be applied to both literary and historical material, to enable comparisons between different types of evidence. This thesis seeks to apply a number of unused approaches, such as network theory, literary analysis and production that will draw together a variety of evidence and provide a balanced view of women's networks.

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[54] S. Frye, 'Sewing Connections: Elizabeth Tudor, Mary Stuart, Elizabeth Talbot, and Seventeenth Century Anonymous Needleworkers' in Frye et al, p.165.
[55] R. Camp, 'Review Article: Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England', Virginia Quarterly Review, Volume 75 1999, p.190.
[56] Howard, in Frye et al, p.309

A range of published research would appear to accept the existence and significance of women's networks in the early modern period. However, none of these studies have questioned the form, nature and structure of the networks, seeming content to assume that they 'supported' women without enquiring how they did this or the wider implications of these networks.

The intention of using women's own writings as evidence has necessitated a detailed examination of women's writing of this period. Anthologies of women's writing have proved very useful, as have bibliographical essays[57]. However, there has been very little work completed on women writers in the north of England, such as Alice Thornton, Anne Clifford and Mary Davys . They are occasionally used to illustrate a point in historical essays, but are rarely considered in their own right, as their writing is not seen as "literature" in a twentieth century sense, the work in print concentrates mainly on biographical material[58]. This research broadens the study of these writers to include more analysis of their writing in its historical context.

The availability of historical source material relating to, or produced by women in the early modern period is increasing year by year. The "world of women" was often thought to be inaccessible because of a lack of documentary evidence

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[57] H.L. Smith, and S. Cardinale, Women and the Literature of the Seventeenth Century,(Westport, Conn.1990). S. J. Steen, 'Recent Studies in Women Writers of the Seventeenth Century, 1604-1674', English Literary Renaissance Volume 26 1994 pp.243-274.

[58] For example, M. George, 'The Pity of Alice Thornton', in George, Women in the First Capitalist Society, (London: Harvester press, 1988) pp.168-179; R. Anselment, 'The Deliverances of Alice Thornton: the Recreation of a Seventeenth Century Life', Prose Studies Volume 19 no. 1 April 1996 pp.19-36.

and their absence from official records. However, once it was recognised that women functioned in the same society as men, finding evidence of their activities and existence merely became a matter of looking in the right places. There is not a lack of historical evidence of women's networks, although it is often difficult to access primary source materials in published form. The cataloguing and publishing of women's texts is improving, particularly with the progress of the cataloguing of women's manuscripts by the Perdita Project at Nottingham Trent University (UK) and the efforts of Brown University (USA) to provide female-authored texts in an easily accessible format.

The emphasis of this study is firmly on women's own evidence and this has meant that to a certain extent, literacy defines the range of women studied. Although most of the women were not from the nobility they were generally from families which could afford to educate them. It was hoped that court records would provide more female testimonies from lower down the social strata, but this evidence was found to be very limited in available records for the geographical area covered. Capp's essay on women's networks and authority[59] and an earlier article by Houlbrooke[60] both use examples of disorderly or riotous groups of women from lower social strata gained from court records. These are limited in detail however, and significant

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[59] B. Capp, 'Separate Domains? Women and Authority in Early Modern England', in Griffiths et al, The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England, (London: Macmillan, 1996).
[60] R. Houlbrooke, 'Women's social life and common action in England from the fifteenth-century to the eve of the civil war', Continuity and Change Volume 1(2) 1986.

reconstruction of the networks is difficult. Women were often hidden from the legal processes, with their views and opinions mediated by the men who represented them and transcribed their words.

The main sources for the exploration of women's informal networks in this thesis are the writings of Alice Thornton and Lady Anne Clifford. Lady Anne Clifford wrote a variety of texts throughout her life including diaries, chronicles and an autobiography, 'The Life of Me'[61]. Acheson suggests that the copies of the *Great Book* now held at Kendal Record Office were a final revision of her life story as they were formally presented and distributed to her heirs. They contain autobiographical writings and genealogies of the Clifford family. It would seem that the chronicles may have been prepared from the diaries, which were then set aside. Lady Anne Clifford also commissioned *The Great Picture*, a visual representation of herself as the head of the Clifford family. There are a small number of published editions of the writings of Lady Anne Clifford which begin with the inclusion of her memoir of 1603 in Seward's *Anecdotes of Some Distinguished Persons*[62] in 1795. Sackville-West produced an edition of her 1616-1619 diary[63] in 1923 and D.J.H. Clifford also included this alongside writings from her later life in his edition of his ancestor's

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[61] K.O. Acheson, The Diary of Lady Anne Clifford 1616-1619, (New York: Garland, 1995). Acheson details the location of manuscripts and copies of Lady Anne Clifford's writings in the Kendal Records Office, Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone, Kent, and The British Library. See Acheson, pp.185-187.

[62] Lady Anne Clifford, 'In the yeare of our Lord 1603...' in W. Seward, editor, Anecdotes of Some distinguished Persons, Volume 1 (London: 1795) pp.141-156.

writings[64]. Acheson's critical edition of the 1616-1619 diaries was taken from a different manuscript copy discovered relatively recently in the manuscript collection of the Marquis of Bath and now known as the Portland MSS.

Lady Anne Clifford's writings have been studied sporadically over the centuries by local historians and memoirists of notable and aristocratic women. Acheson identified the lack of gendered insecurity in Lady Anne Clifford's writing as a reason why she may have been overlooked by studies of women writers in the 1970s and 1980s[65]. More recently however, her work has received critical attention from Lewalski, Wilcox and Lamb[66] who have recognised the importance of her writings as autobiography that empowers the writer 'by conflating the discourses of aristocratic privilege and gender difference'[67].

Alice Thornton, a Yorkshire gentlewoman, wrote a number of autobiographical texts throughout her life. In 1873 the Surtees Society published 'The Autobiography

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[63] Lady Anne Clifford, The Diary of Lady Anne Clifford, V. Sackville-West, editor, (London: William Heinemann, 1923)
[64] Lady Anne Clifford, The Diaries of Lady Anne Clifford, Editor D.J.H. Clifford, (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1990).
[65] Acheson, p. 32.
[66] H. Wilcox, 'Private Writing and Public Function: Autobiographical Texts by Renaissance Englishwomen', in S.P. Cerasano and M. Wynne-Davies, editors, Gloriana's Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992). M.E. Lamb, 'The Agency of the Split Subject: Lady Anne Clifford and the Uses of Reading', English Literary Renaissance 22 1992. B.K. Lewalski, Writing Women in Jacobean England, (London: Harvard University Press, 1993), also Writing Women and Reading in the Renaissance, Renaissance Quarterly 44 1991.
[67] Acheson, p. 32.

of Mrs Alice Thornton of East Newton, County York'[68], edited by Charles Jackson. This took three manuscript accounts of Alice Thornton's life, written by her at different times, and produced from them a single "autobiography". To achieve this, the editor found it necessary to 'make omissions...to transpose passages here and there'[69] which resulted in a chaotic and disrupted text. Unfortunately the three volumes used for the Surtees Society publication cannot be traced, but the small 'Book of Remembrances' which was Alice Thornton's original text, and was later expanded to create the later volumes, has survived. It is in the possession of a direct descendent of the Thornton family and was generously made available for this project. This is a tiny handwritten book of 203 pages, with each page measuring 10cmx8cm, entitled 'A Book of remembrances of all the remarkable deliverances of my selfe, Husband & Children wth theire births, & other remarks as conserning my selfe & family beginning from the yeare, 1625'.This text will be used where possible but reference will also be made to the Surtees Society edition as it provides a certain amount of detail which is not contained in the 'Book of Remembrances'. The Surtees Society text is useful in some respects as it contains material now unavailable, however the editing renders the text difficult to use and the energy and vitality of the writing evident in the manuscript cited above are totally lost in this edition. The difficulties in accessing Alice Thornton's writings would appear to have discouraged

[68] Alice Thornton, The Autobiography of Mrs Alice Thornton of East Newton, County York, C. Jackson, editor, (Durham: Surtees Society, 1873).

greater study of her as a writer, as Margaret George notes that 'an afternoon spent with her bulky volume tries the spirits of the most motivated reader'[70]. Letters, wills and the writings of Mrs Thornton's son-in-law, Thomas Comber will also be used as evidence in Chapter 3.

Both Alice Thornton and Lady Anne Clifford wrote texts about their own lives which are variously described as diaries, autobiographies, journals or memoirs. The lack of consensus on which genre the works fit into reflects the problem of making women's texts of the seventeenth century fit into categories designed for those written by men, rather than an actual problem with the type of writing itself. Both Alice Thornton and Lady Anne Clifford wrote about their lives retrospectively for their own personal satisfaction and to leave a record of their achievements for others[71]. The form of their writing is similar to that of many documents written by women at this time in that it is very personal, meditative and domestic, giving an enormous amount of information about the day-to-day lives of the authors. Whilst the literary nature of the artefact obviously restricts analysis to the educated woman of at least gentry status, sources of this kind which give copious information and detail about their author's lives, provide an invaluable starting point for the study of women's

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[69] Thornton, p. xv.
[70] Margaret George, Women in the First Capitalist Society, (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988) p.168.
[71] H. Wilcox, 'Private Writing and Public Function: Autobiographical Texts by Renaissance Englishwomen', in S.P. Cerasano and M. Wynne-Davies, Gloriana's Face: Women, Public and Private in the English Renaissance,(London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992) pp. 47-62. Wilcox provides a clear analysis of the function of seventeenth century women's autobiographical writing.

networks. The representation of women's networks in women's fictional writing and the connections between fiction and autobiography is considered in Chapter 6.

The use of the archive material from the Quaker Women's Meetings and published tracts by seventeenth century Quaker women gives a voice to women of mainly lower social status. The Society of Friends believed that it was important to retain a record of their activities and in particular, their "sufferings" as proof of their suitability for salvation. The sources for Quaker history have therefore been carefully preserved and in many cases microfilmed. The Society of Friends have allowed easy access to these records by providing copies for local archives. The seventeenth century records for Quakers in the North-east of England are held on microfilm at Tyne and Wear and Durham County Archives and Darlington Public Library. There are also some letters and personal records in the Maude and Ogden Family Muniments held in the Tyne and Wear Archives. The Society of Friends Library at Friends House, London, holds an exhaustive collection of material relating to the wider movement since its founding in the mid seventeenth century.

Chapter 5 examines the foundation and development of a Roman Catholic women's organisation, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM). In direct contrast to the very public personae of Quakers, Roman Catholicism in seventeenth century England was a quiet and secretive religion. The legislation against recusants was punitive and persecution was the norm. This has created a variety of

problems regarding the availability of historical sources. Many Catholic women left no written accounts of their lives as their testimony could lead to danger for others. The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary have carefully preserved their records however, by storing them in houses situated in sympathetic regions of Europe. The archives remain scattered, although the 50 pictures of "The Painted Life" are together in Nymphemburg, Germany. Letters, manuscripts, personal papers and copies of "The Painted Life" are available at the Centre for Catholic Studies at the Bar Convent, York.

Literature written by early modern women provides a vast amount of material that is relevant to the study of women's networks at this time. A small proportion of this has been produced in new editions in the twentieth century. Microfilm copies of original published work have proved invaluable for this study as the majority of women's writings that remain are only accessible in archives.

In the initial stages of research, the timescale for this thesis was 1500-1750. It was necessary to begin very broadly as so little work had been done on this topic and the amount of evidence that would be available was not known. Relevant and interesting primary source material for this period proved to be more substantial than expected, and as a result, the time period of the thesis has been limited to 1600-1725, in order to reflect the concentration of organised women's networks that developed in the seventeenth century. Some comparative examples do fall outside

this range however. As this century included many major upheavals, such as civil war, religious conflict and economic change, there would appear to be enough variety for comparisons to be made without needing to cover more than one hundred and twenty five years. The relatively sudden appearance of organised women's groups in the seventeenth century makes this time of particular interest.

This study has been given a regional focus, restricting it to women with strong connections to northern England. Many of the women in the networks studied did not spend their entire lives in northern England but they did retain strong links with the area and returned to it when their situation allowed. It would be possible to produce a survey of women's networks in the whole of England, but I feel that the regional focus will allow more comparative analysis of the impact of religious, economic and political change on networks within a closely defined area. Northern England was chosen because it offered a range of suitable material which could be accessed within the limits of funding and resources.

Certain subject areas have been omitted from detailed consideration such as the study of women's networks and witchcraft, wills, midwifery, folk lore and paid work. The analysis of women's networks in this thesis will allow development of the study of similar structures. Many of these areas have been studied fairly extensively and it is hoped that the methodology that is developed in this thesis could be easily applied to evidence of other women's networks in the future, thereby widening and

expanding the study of this topic. Some of this material will be used in a more minor way and comparisons will be made with organisations such as female confraternities in France and enclosed religious communities.

This introduction has outlined the general approach to the subject of women's networks. Chapter 2 will provide a more detailed discussion of methodology. The methodology has been developed from a survey of contemporary feminist, social science and anthropological research into networks in the twentieth century. As this methodology has not been used in any previous studies of the early modern period, I felt that it warranted a full explanation and consideration of its application to historical research. A detailed study of women's networks as a specific entity in the early modern period has not been attempted prior to this project and the use of network analysis has proved extremely productive in providing a framework for identifying and examining women's networks. As already discussed, networks are widely accepted as having existed in early modern England by Frye, Capp and others, but a coherent structure for identifying and studying them needs to be developed. Network theory has been used by contemporary researchers to provide a descriptive analysis of social networks and the way in which they exist alongside formal and informal social structures. Chapter 2 will therefore explore and analyse methodologies that are suitable for use with evidence from the early modern period and provide discussion of their application in contemporary research.

Chapter 3 will use the personal records of Lady Anne Clifford and Alice Thornton to identify and analyse their networks, identifying their uses and the problems associated with them. It will concentrate on the informal, unofficial networks of these women and will use the methodologies outlined in Chapter 2, including network analysis, to provide a structure for the close examination of women's networks, how they functioned and the way in which they fitted into women's lives and society as a whole. Network analysis will be used to identify and categorise the networks within formal and informal social structures in terms of age, religion, social status and kin and to assist in analysis of their function and development. This chapter will further explore the potential of individual women using their networks to affect their societies without using official channels, while identifying and analysing the organisational methods which enabled the networks to have such an effect. It will also analyse the changes in networks depending on the needs of their members and the way in which they were adapted to various social situations. Although it concentrates on the networks of Lady Anne Clifford and Alice Thornton, Robertson's example suggests the extent to which women used their connections and how many of them may have been overlooked in previous historical research. Alice Thornton and Lady Anne Clifford both left extensive writings about their everyday lives, with details of their contacts and connections. Their writings were unpublished and very personal, giving substantial accounts of their difficulties

and the steps they took to overcome them. The detail in their writings and the fact that both women give accounts of events over a number of decades of their lives mean that it is possible to compare and contrast specific situations and the effectiveness of the support they received at different times and from different people.

Informal networks would appear to have had distinct advantages for women in the seventeenth century. They could be flexible, adaptable and provide effective support to their members at times when it was most needed. Their informality also gave them a degree of invisibility to outsiders, as they were difficult to identify and they could disperse or regroup as the need arose. This flexibility meant that women's networks could escape the censure and condemnation that was often aimed at those who were more visible. Throughout the seventeenth century, a number of formal women's networks were developed which placed their members firmly in the public eye.

Chapters 4 and 5 will discuss formally organised women's networks and communities. An examination of secondary sources relating to support groups has shown a difference in their organisation and function depending on the gender of the majority of those involved. Networks serving and consisting mainly of men, such as guilds[72], youth groups[73] and confraternities[74], appeared to act as extensions to the

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[72] H. Swanson, 'The Illusion of Economic Structure: Craft Guilds in Late Medieval English Towns', Past and Present no. 121.

existing family structure and reinforced state ideology. Primary source material indicates that in general, the networks formed and used by women were more likely to be informal, democratic and non-hierarchical. They seem to have offered women an alternative to the patriarchal institutions of family, state and church.

In the early modern period, there were changes in the opportunities for women to hold public office, especially outside of the family and this was also the case within the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in England. Throughout Europe the centralisation and bureaucratisation of government and the growth of national monarchies created formal, male-dominated institutions from which women were legally and culturally excluded[75]. The Roman Catholic church had a long tradition of misogyny and this social change reinforced their ideas of the inferiority of women and their marginalisation of women within the organisational structure of the church. Throughout the seventeenth century however, Catholic women fought to have their activities valued and recognised by their society. The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM) were a group of English Roman Catholic women who aimed to work within their church by supporting and educating women.

B. Pullen, Poverty and Charity: Europe, Italy, Venice, 1400-1700, (Aldershot: Varionum, 1994).
D.H. Sacks, 'The Demise of the Martyrs: The Feast of St Clement and St Katherine in Bristol 1400-1600', Social History Volume 11 1986.
[73] B. Capp, 'English Youth Groups and the Pinder of Wakefield'. Past and Present Volume 103 1984.
S. Brigden, 'Youth and the English Reformation', Past and Present Volume 103 1984.
[74] R. R. Harding, 'The Mobilization of the Confraternities Against the Reformation in France', Sixteenth Century Journal, Volume XI no. 2 1980.
[75] S. Kettering, 'The Patronage Power of Early Modern French Noblewomen', Historical Journal volume 32 1989, p. 817.

Chapter 4 will examine the IBVM as a whole from its origins in the early seventeenth century, its members, aims and organisation[76]. It will use the methodology outlined in Chapter 2 to look at the relationships between the women, and the way in which they managed to organise and survive over time and space. The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary did create a world of their own from which they attempted to shape and influence the lives of Roman Catholic women in England. They rejected any ideas that their status might be 'derived from their stage in a life cycle, from their biological functions, and in particular, from their sexual or biological ties to particular men'[77]. Chapter 4 analyses the development of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary and compares it to the other formal organisations for women which were established in the seventeenth century.

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[76] The literature about the IBVM is exclusively focused on Mary Ward, the woman generally credited with its inspiration and foundation. As a writer, visionary and mystic, Mary Ward had been missing from studies of women in the Early Modern period, possibly because of most of her working life was spent in exile on mainland Europe. This omission has more recently been remedied and she is now beginning to be recognised alongside other important contemporary writers. See D. L. Latz, Glow-Worm Light: Writings of 17th Century English Women From Original Manuscripts (Salzburg: University of Salzburg Press, 1989), R. Martin, Women Writers in Renaissance England, (London: Longman, 1998). There has been a tendency however, to create the idea of one remarkable woman and present the IBVM as a side issue. This problem stems from the early members of the Institute themselves whose contemporary histories of their organisation are principally biographies of Mary Ward, but it was also continued by nineteenth and twentieth century biographers and historians of the IBVM. More recent work has begun to address the institute as an organisation, see S. O'Brien, 'Women of the English Catholic Community: nuns and pupils at the Bar Convent, York, 1680-1790', in J. Loades, editor, Monastic Studies I, (Bangor: Headstart History, 1990). Sr G. Kirkus, , 'The presence of the Mary Ward Institute in Yorks 1642-8', Recusant History 25 2001. L. Lux-Sterritt, 'An analysis of the controversy caused by Mary Ward's Institute in the 1620s', Recusant History Volume 25 (3) 2001. S.L. Barstow, '"Worth nothing but very wilful": Catholic recusant women of Yorks. 1536-1642', Recusant History Volume 25 (4) 2001.

One of the most widespread organisations for women in late seventeenth century England were the Quaker Women's Meetings which are analysed in Chapter 5. This chapter will look at the Society of Friends Women's Meetings in the north-east of England in the second half of the seventeenth century. The meetings in the north-east will be considered as part of a national movement which will allow analysis of the origins of this formal organisation for women, its membership, objectives, function and the effect of opposition on the women who attended. The women members of these meetings were in an unusual position, being part of an organisation purely for women, but also wives, mothers, sisters and daughters in a fairly traditional sense. There is a considerable body of work available on the Society of Friends and some deals specifically with the Women's Meetings. They are generally examined as part of the national movement or in terms of their right to preach, however[78]. This chapter looks at who the members of the women's Meetings were, and what they did for other women and in their local communities.

Although it has been found that many of the networks identified did provide a support function, to concentrate on this would give an idealised picture. Support was found to be only one function of the networks. Cases of conflict and the causes and

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[77] M.Z. Rosaldo, 'Woman, Culture and Society: A Theoretical Overview', in Rosaldo and Lamphere, editors, Woman, Culture and Society, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), p.30.

[78] There are a number of texts and articles which look at Quaker women. Biographies of Margaret Fell give a good profile of the "leader" of the women and Phyllis Mack provides a thoughtful account of the issues of prophesy and preaching with regard to early Quaker women. B. Y. Kunze, Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism,(London: MacMillan, 1994), P. Mack, Visionary Women (London:

resolution of this conflict provide valuable insights into the workings of the networks. Because of their documentation of meetings and activities, the formally organised networks provide an insight into the stresses and opposition faced by their members. Quaker women remained within society, in families and marriages, and one of the questions that this chapter asks is, whether they 'enter the men's world or... create a public world of their own'[79]?

Chapter 6 examines the ideas about women's networks which are evident in the literature of early modern England. Fictional literature written by women in the seventeenth century, such as poetry and drama, is examined to discover the way in which women's relationships with each other were represented by their authors. Women's texts indicated an awareness of the potential of female networks to impact on their society. They show that they understood how, by the use of reciprocity, exchange and honour, their networks could work to their advantage and also the effect that the breakdown of a network could have on its members. This chapter will show that women's awareness of their networks meant that they often portrayed their relationships with each other in a different way to male authors of the same period.

This thesis aims to provide an introduction to the history of women's networks, showing the variety and scale of formal and informal organisations. It is not intended

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University of California Press, 1992). See also, C. Trevitt, Women and Quakerism in the Seventeenth Century, (London: William Sessions, 1991).

to be comprehensive, but hopes to provide a framework for further research. The analysis of a number of different women's networks will illuminate their complexity and their relationship to other social structures. It will show that the networks were as individual as the women who created them. Extra-domestic ties with other women were, and are, an important source of power and value for women. Their strengths and weaknesses were determined by the very flexibility and imagination of their members in being able to create a network structure that could accommodate their needs and desires, whilst also being able to function in early modern society.

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[79] Rosaldo, p.36.

Chapter 2

Contemporary Theories of Network Analysis

This chapter outlines methodology that is suitable for use when examining women's support networks in the early modern period. There is an absence of detailed network studies in early modern history therefore to use network analysis on evidence from this time it is necessary to apply theoretical structures that are based on contemporary analysis. The study of support networks outside of the family and the state in this period has generally been restricted to guilds and confraternities which confined their membership to men[80] and were primarily concerned with employment and method and quality of production. Most of the studies comment on the social support function of these organisations as a by-product of the main function which was usually concerned with religion or employment.

Social networks are often more important for women than men because of their exclusion from formal methods of support. The law, inheritance and cultural practices of many societies have often given women very little official control over their lives, therefore informal networks and activities would seem to be of increased significance. In the modern era, the search for progress and the idea that society can achieve emancipation through rational order and the application of reason has

led to concentration on the study of formal society, particularly in an historical context where evidence from formal sources is so much more accessible. Failure to take account of informal practices, however, hinders the understanding of everyday life, particularly when it concerns those who were marginalised or excluded from the formal system[81].

The study of women's relationships with each other has been widely neglected across all disciplines. Whether they fall under the auspices of sociology, psychology, literature or history, women are generally seen to exist in relation to men and the frameworks by which their lives are examined have been developed from this perspective. Men are seen as the active and positive force in society, with women as their opposite and therefore by definition, passive and negative presence. A group consisting of only women is perceived as lacking an essential component: 'women without men are women without companionship or company'[82].

In *Woman, Culture and Society*[83] Rosaldo noted that:

> Male, as opposed to female, activities are always recognised as predominantly important, and cultural systems give authority and value to the roles and activities of men[84].

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[80] The most obvious exception to this is K. Norberg, 'Women's Confraternities in Seventeenth Century France', Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History, Volume 6 1978.
[81] Laguerre, p. 1.
[82] J. Raymond, A Passion For Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection, (London: Women's Press, 1986) p.3.
[83] Rosaldo, p. 19.
[84] Rosaldo, p. 19.

The organisations which have been the subject of the most historical attention in the early modern period are those which held authority within that culture. Consequently, the royal court, government, law, church and family have received significant analysis as they were recognised as the institutions which held authority by the cultural commentators of the time. While women may have been important, powerful and influential in their communities, it seems that relative to men of their age and social status, they lacked a generally recognised and culturally valued authority. Historians have generally followed the lead of contemporary culture in assuming that because women had no legitimised power or authority, they therefore had no influence on events or people.

This concentration of attention on formal expressions of authority has overlooked the fact that, while they acknowledged male authority, women may have directed it to their own interests. The power exercised in this way by women may have had a considerable and systematic effect on their communities, and society in general. The distinction between having the power to change and influence events and holding culturally legitimised authority is critical to the study of women's networks. Rosaldo has suggested that:

> while authority legitimates the use of power, it does not exhaust it, and the actual methods of giving rewards, controlling information, exerting pressure, and shaping events may be available to women as well as to men."[85]

[85] Rosaldo, p.21.

In order to exercise their ability to affect the direction of their own lives and those around them, women needed to raise their status and gain recognition of the importance of their position.

It has been suggested that women's status would be lowest in those societies where there was a firm differentiation between private and public spheres of activity and where women were also isolated and placed under a single man's authority, in the home.[86] Their position could be raised if they were able to challenge those claims to authority, either by taking on men's roles or by establishing social ties, by creating a world in which women prevailed. One of the ways that women could win power and value was by stressing their differences from men. If they accepted the cultural definition of womanhood by taking on the symbols and expectations associated with it, they could then induce men into compliance, or establish a society for themselves which functioned to their own rules and agenda.

Many early modern women assimilated the idea that women were inherently virtuous, but needed support and a suitable environment to be able to develop their virtue effectively. They created a "women's society founded on the idiom of purity, on a lack of involvement with men ...a pure and moral society, a world wholly their own."[87] Therefore they accepted the prevailing view of society that women should be pious, chaste and religious, but used this idea as the basis for arguing for their own

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[86] Rosaldo, p.36.
[87] Rosaldo, p.39.

space within society, where they would be away from the temptations and corruption of the masculine world. The creation of women's networks was a way in which women could define a part of their society by developing a public world of their own.

Janet Todd has explored the idea of female friendship in eighteenth century literature, noting that:

> fictional friendship grew out of the idea of the confidante...seemingly on the periphery of the plot, she may usurp the center when the perspective on action is changed'[88]

This project similarly intends to change the perspective when viewing female to female relationships within early modern society, putting them at the centre of attention, rather than allowing them to remain on the periphery. When the angle is altered, women's relationships with each other can be seen to have a purpose beyond the socially accepted idea of recreation by providing support, creating a fictive kinship and enabling them to subvert and influence events far outside of their capacity as individual women.

The prevailing idea of women as incomplete beings goes back as far as Aristotle and has regularly been used to justify actions which subordinate women. This means that it has proved difficult to place them as the centre of attention in society, except when they are objectified as victims of male desire or derision. They are almost exclusively situated within the formal structures of society such as marriage and the family where their relationship to the masculine is the defining

feature of their position. Rosaldo has noted that women's status is generally related to their biological function or life stage and specifically to their sexual or biological relationship to certain men[89]. While men are largely defined by their role within society as a whole, usually by their employment, women are defined by their marital status or place in the family hierarchy[90]. Female groups and networks exist outside the expected range of relationships and there is no approved place exclusively for women in society.

However, there is a serious flaw in the usual position of viewing female friendships purely in relation to the family, where they are seen as a complementary. The examination of female networks through the family structure is similar to looking at women only through the perceptions of men, which would give a distorted picture. The fact that female friendships and networks are able to exist within, alongside, independently and as a replacement for family structures means that important issues are overlooked if they are solely viewed in this way. One of the difficulties in studying women's networks as opposed to those of men, is that they are generally more informal and less easy to identify.

There are a number of approaches which are relevant to the study of support networks, but there is no one coherent framework to apply to this subject. The development of women's history and the analysis of the society in which women

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[88] J. Todd, Women's Friendship in Literature, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) p. 1.
[89] Rosaldo, p. 30.

have functioned produced ideas of a difference in the world in which women have functioned, compared to that of men. The separation of society into "public" and "private" spheres creates the idea of two distinct arenas, with women existing solely in the private sphere while men go out into the public world of employment and social government. Many studies are based on:

> a structural model that relates recurrent aspects of psychology and cultural and social organisation to an opposition between the "domestic" orientation of women and the extra-domestic or "public" ties that, in most societies are primarily available to men.[91]

While this may be applicable to the upper and middle classes of the nineteenth century, it would seem much less relevant to a period in which both social and architectural worlds were less clearly delineated. The use of the home as a base for employment activities plus the necessity of an often wide-ranging mobility for women who were engaged in domestic activities, meant that the distinction between public and private areas was much less obvious. A much more useful basis for analysis in pre-industrial times would seem to be the contrast between formal and informal structures.

The use of this analytical framework has been generally restricted to social scientists studying the urban economy[92], although in the case of Laguerre his focus is on social organisation and is therefore very relevant to this study. Informality can

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[90] See *introduction*, p.1
[91] Rosaldo, p.18
[92] Laguerre, pp. 1-4.

be defined as a structure of action with an implicit or explicit intention that has a specific goal, distinguished from formality by the degree to which it is integral to, or alternative to official institutions[93]. The conception of the informal system as an alternative to the formal system implies that it is a separate reality and that all observations must be placed in one or the other category. This model suggests that the formal and informal systems compete with each other and there is a potential for the informal system to hold the same or greater power than the formal. The organisation of production is used as the major criterion for distinction, for example, factory and non-factory, capitalist and subsistence, traditional and modern. However, it has been asserted that 'informality and formality...should be regarded as representing the poles of a continuum'[94]. Informality is linked to the formal system through the peripheries where mixtures and overlaps occur. Whatever differences are apparent in the cores these are much less obvious in the peripheries, where they may even join. Whereas informality may be seen as a marginal system, it is nevertheless part of the total and is internal, not external to it. It is central to society and can be seen as 'a glue that unites various parts of the formal system together'[95]. It does not operate autonomously but its role is based on linking two formal units together and will strive to maintain the system as a whole.

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[93] Laguerre, p. 3.
[94] P. Harding, and R. Jenkins, The Myth of the Hidden Economy: Towards a New Understanding of Informal Economic Activity, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1989) p. 51.
[95] Laguerre, p. 5.

The use of informality within law can be seen to function in three ways. It refers to the transition to a formal legal system from folk and popular cultural practices. It includes the use of informal means to achieve formal goals, the informal aspects of formal legal practices. Finally, it encompasses the informal court system in which disputes are solved before they reach the formal legal system at family or neighbourhood level[96]. It can be seen from this example that both formal and informal practices work towards the same goal, which is to maintain peace and social order. It seems that the more a social system is regulated and formularized however, the more likely it is to create informal mechanisms that escape the control of the formal system[97].

The activities of female beer brewers in early 1970s Nairobi[98] are a contemporary example of the importance of networks within the informal system and the advantages of informality for women in employment created by restrictions within the formal system. Kenya was one of the few African countries to criminalise the brewing of traditional beers. A high proportion of the women of the Mathare Valley brewed Buzaa beer made from maize flour and millet yeast, although its production was illegal. It was a difficult process and the necessary equipment was expensive,

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[96] Laguerre, p. 5.
[97] L. A. Lomnitz, 'Informal Exchange Networks in Formal Systems: a theoretical model', American Anthropologist, Vol. 90 1988 p.43.
[98] N. Nelson, "Women Must Help Each Other': The Operation of Personal Networks Among Buzaa Beer Brewers in Mathare Valley, Kenya', in P. Caplan and J. Bujra, Women: Women United, Women Divided, (London: Tavistock, 1978) pp. 77-98. J.M. Bennett, Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England:

consequently few women owned all of what was needed. Although the brewing was difficult and illegal, the alternative employment for uneducated women was domestic or bar work for poor wages and without childcare. The ability of the women to combine caring for their children with brewing in their own homes to maintain a basic level of subsistence would have made this a more attractive proposition. Buzaa brewing appeared to have been an exclusively female activity in this area, with the men taking work in formal businesses. The beer had to be consumed within twenty four hours which necessitated its almost immediate sale.

Social scientists assert that network structure is 'both a cause and a consequence of action'[99]: individuals affect and are also affected by networks. However, the individual is the active agent in the creation of their own network structure, responding to their own specific needs. Although the women did not brew collectively they were each part of an effective and extended brewing network borrowing essential equipment from each other, warning of police raids and caring for each other's property. If a woman was arrested the network would inform her family, hide her equipment and care for her children. The women would circulate information about the credit-worthiness of their male customers and co-ordinate their brewing to ensure that they would not be competing directly for customers. Living a

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Women's Work in a Changing World 1300-1600, (Oxford: Oxford University Press) discusses female brewers in Medieval England, their difficulties and place in the society of the time.

[99] A. C Adcock,. and J. S. Hurlbert, 'Social Network Analysis: A Structural Perspective for Family Studies', Journal of Social And Personal Relationships Volume 7 1990 p. 246.

subsistence lifestyle on the fringes of a capitalist system did not inspire the women to challenge the formal system in an active way. Their aspirations tended to be to join the formal system by buying land or buildings or educating one of their children to a level whereby they could gain waged employment. In the seventeenth century, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary had a similar struggle to participate as a recognised organisation within the Roman Catholic Church. Their aim was to join the formal system, not provide an alternative to it.

It could be suggested that, like the Kenyan brewers, the IBVM's informal activities outlined in chapter 4 did provide a challenge to official institutions, their lack of protest about their situation and the desire to fit in to the formal system effectively negated this. However, it would seem that the solidarity of the women and the formation of their network pushed the boundaries designed to keep them in their place by creating an alternative structure which was able to circumvent official rules and authority. Where conflict occurs between the formal and informal systems it can be seen as a conflict between ideologies which can provide information about power struggles and alternative political and communal structures.

The position of marginalised minorities can be seen to encourage reliance on other members of the group for emotional and practical support. Pizzorno[100] suggests that when those who are disadvantaged in some way unite around an

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[100] A. Pizzorno, 'An Introduction to the Theory of Political Participation', Social Science Information, *Volume 9 (5) 1970.*

issue which can have universal application their solidarity is potentially subversive. This results from the challenging of the social boundaries which encompass the group in its inferior position.

The development of the Sanctified Church in the post-Reconstruction Southern USA presents a clear example of the effect of marginalisation on an evolving organisation and of the attempt of the women within it to use their solidarity to create their own place.

The women were doubly discriminated against because of both their colour and gender and were also under pressure from their own communities to provide a supportive role to black men, rather than a challenge to them. The Sanctified Church represented the black religious institutions which developed after the American Civil War in response to changes in worship patterns within the black community[101]. The rejection of an organisational model which mirrored Euro-African patriarchy gave women an opportunity to establish themselves within the institution of their church. There had been a tendency to see black churches 'only as agencies of socio-political change led by black pastors'[102] which obscured the crucial role of black women who made up 75-90% of the participants in religious activities[103]. Within the

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[101] C.T. Gilkes, '"Together and in Harness": Women's Traditions in the Sanctified Church', Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, Volume 10 no. 4 1985.
[102] Gilkes, p. 679.
[103] T. Hoover, 'Black Women and the Churches: Triple Jeopardy,' in G. Wilmore and J. Cone, ed. Black Theology: A Documentary History, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979) pp. 377-388.

most authoritarian and least democratic of formally organised organisations the church-women created an institutional basis for women's self-consciousness.

The Sanctified Church gave women spiritual and professional role models which can be compared to Quaker women in seventeenth-century England. These were provided to counter the economic and sexual exploitation used as a rationale for their denigration in the wider society. Higher education and work were seen as the means to achieve upward mobility and economic power which reinforced their heroic role within the church and helped to maintain their collective autonomy. The formation of the National Association of Colored Women in 1896 reiterated their aims:

> Our women's movement... is led and directed by women for the good of women and men, for the benefit of all humanity... we are not alienating or withdrawing, we are only coming to the front'[104]

The women were able to develop an almost autonomous organisation within the church at the beginning of the twentieth century partly because the leader of the church was unmarried therefore the traditional idea of the "pastor's wife" leading the women within the church was not applicable. In their own organisation the women were able to maintain their collective autonomy and 'learn the language of biblical feminism'[105]. The emphasis on biblical authority meant that literacy was essential for leading a sanctified life. As the majority of employment opportunities for black

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[104] *Josephine St Pierre Ruffin, quoted in Gilkes*, pp. 681-682.
[105] Gilkes, p. 693.

women were in the domestic market at this time, the women were at risk from unwelcome sexual advances by male employers. Education was seen as a vital strategy to avoid these risks and educated women were expected to participate in elevating their "sisters" during church gatherings. The women did not view their concentration on educational roles as segregation, but used it as 'the basis for alternative structures of authority, career pathways and spheres of influence'[106]. As in many other women's organisations, the women's leadership was consensual, collective and inclusive, in contrast to the hierarchical, individualistic and dominating style of the church outside of their direct influence. Whilst they may have reacted against this, their position as a racially oppressed minority served to remind the women of the importance of unity in ensuring the survival of their religion and their position within it.

Contemporary Networks and Network Analysis

The study of contemporary support networks comes from the convergence of two separate points of enquiry and has only occurred in the past three decades[107] . The stimulus for research into social support came from the fields of community mental health and epidemiology. The researchers hoped to discover social relationships

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[106] Gilkes, p. 689.
[107] B.H. Gottlieb, 'Social Support and the Study of Personal Relationships', Journal of Social and Personal Relationships Volume 2 1985 pp.351-75.

which gave protection against stress-induced illness and disease[108], such as tuberculosis, duodenal ulcer, asthma, arthritis and heart disease. Lack of social support was found to contribute to the onset and/or the progression of these illnesses. Hawkins and Holmes found that in 1950s Seattle, the highest rates of tuberculosis were found in those people who, regardless of their race, were an ethnic minority in a particular area and therefore isolated from those sharing their own cultural and social traditions[109].

Similar results have been collated regarding mental health and the impact of the death of a spouse. The loss of a partner, whether by death or divorce, appears to disrupt the social support networks contributing to depression and social breakdown. Cobb and Jones[110] identified the main findings of research into social networks as follows:

1. Lack of support contributes to depression and social breakdown.
2. Social support moderates the relationship between certain life stresses and the strains resulting from them.
3. Lack of support contributes to certain physical illnesses.
4. Social support improves adherence to medical regimes.

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[108] B.H. Gottleib, 'Social Support as a Focus for Integrative Research in Psychology', American Psychologist, Volume 38 1983 pp.278-87.
[109] Hawkins and Holmes quoted in S. Duck, editor, Personal Relationships 5: Repairing Personal Relationships, (London: Academic Press, 1984) pp. 47-66.
[110] S. Cobb and J. M. Jones, 'Social Support, Support Groups and Marital Relationships', in Duck, p.47-66.

5. Most of the social support effect comes through coping mechanisms. These are achieved by the subjective support of the member and the supportive behaviour of others through the network, which generates a feeling of well-being in the member.

The use of network analysis as a conceptual and methodological tool can provide an array of data about the form and structure of social networks[111]. Network analysts explain social phenomena by looking at the interconnectedness of the members of a particular group and how they relate to each other. The composition of the social networks is considered by examining the types of people in a network, in terms of age, race, sex, income and kin. Research in the United States has found that networks there are composed of a high level of kin[112]. This has not been found to be beneficial however, as networks containing a single type of relationship can create feelings of low self esteem and generally lower social integration.

The models shown here (Figure 2) illustrate three types of network and categorise them in terms of density. The lines linking the members indicate a connection between them. In Model A, only Member 1 is connected to more than one other, creating a very loose network structure. If Member 1 was not present in this arrangement, the network would cease to exist.

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[111] Adcock, and Hurlbert, pp. 245-264.
[112] D.G. Unger, and D.R. Powell, 'Supporting Families Under Stress: The Role of Social Networks' Family Relations Volume 29 pp. 599-74.

In Model B each member is connected to at least one other person, giving the network a much firmer structure. If any of the network members were missing from this example the network would continue to function because of the interrelated relationships of its members.

Model C shows a dense network, with a larger number of members, all of whom are connected to at least one other person. Member 1 has links with Members 2,3,4,5 and 10, and through them is connected to Members 6,7,8,9 and 11.

The density of networks is found to influence the well-being of members in certain circumstances. For example, those on low incomes with dense networks (e.g., Figure 1, Model C) are more likely to feel happy with their situation than those with sparse networks but in similar circumstances (e.g., Fig 1, Model A)[113].

Similarly, the size of networks can serve as an indicator of health and well-being, as large networks are associated with happiness and good mental health and those people within these networks are more socially integrated[114]. Sparse networks of limited range are less useful in instrumental action, such as finding work, and extremely small networks may create problems because they cannot provide adequate social support.

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[113] C.S. Fischer, To Dwell Among Friends: Personal Networks in Town and City, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) pp.393-34.

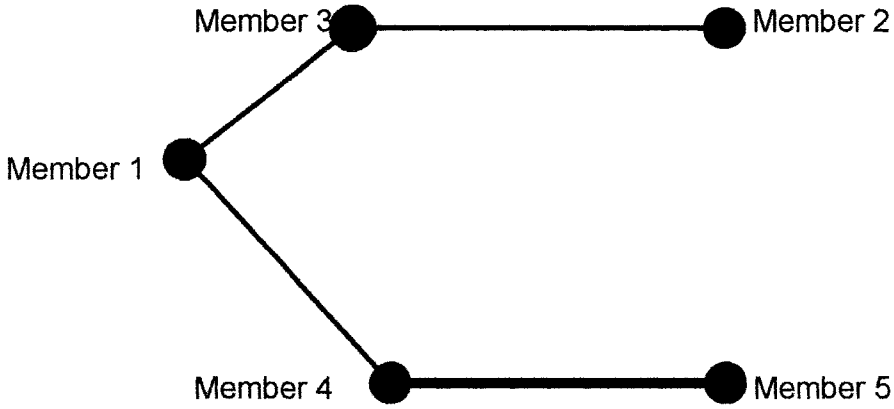
[114] *Gerstal et al, 'Explaining the Symtomatoloy of Separated and Divorced Women and Men: the Role* of Material Conditions and Social Networks', Social Forces Volume. 64, pp. 84-101.

From this information it could be assumed that all those people without large, dense social networks are social failures, swamped with the symptoms of mental and physical ill health. In fact, these types of network can become a burden to their members because of the demands of managing them and less dense networks can provide a more flexible social support which could be beneficial to those with a major change in their lives[115]. Networks can be disrupted by many changes such as life-cycle adjustments, geographical relocation and changes in occupational status. It would appear that different needs and life stages warrant different types of network and the flexibility of the person creating and maintaining these networks could be the key.

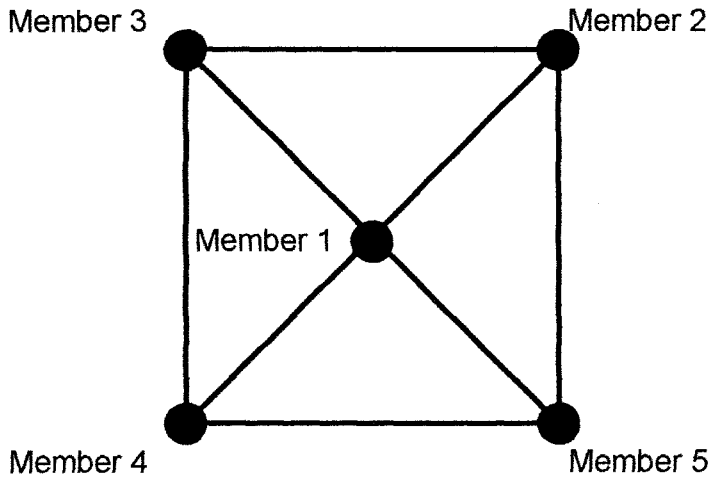
[115] Gerstal p. 85.

Figure 1: Models of Network Density[116]

Model A : Sparse

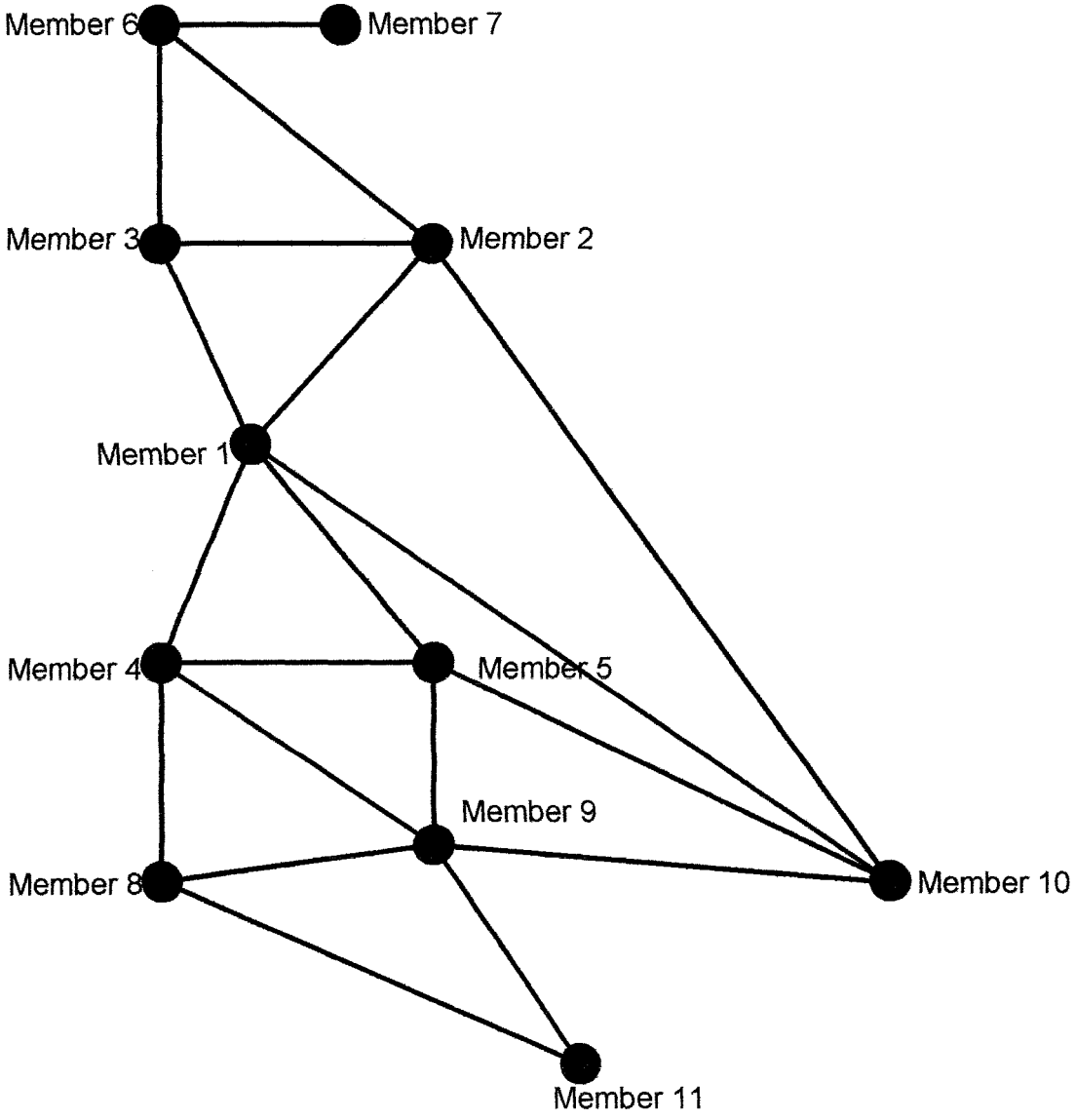


Model B : Moderate



[116] Based on *Models of Network Density* in Adcock and Hurlbert, p. 248.

Model C: Dense



It is also important, particularly when concentrating on one specific type of network, to recognise that each member will undoubtedly be part of other networks which are not mutually exclusive. A person working outside of the home will usually have a network of co-workers whose only link with their kin network is the person themselves. Each has their place and function which will not generally overlap, except perhaps in times of crisis. The networks around one person are termed clusters, connected to each other only by the bridging tie of that person. A study in Thailand of mobility due to employment showed that a worker in the city maintained at least two networks, one in the rural area and one in the urban area[117]. These networks were equally dense but had no connection to each other apart from the worker.

The behaviour which demonstrates support is culturally dependent, and therefore when examining networks this must be acknowledged. Cobb and Jones[118] have identified four types of behaviour which provide a feeling of support in the recipient:

1. Love or intimacy - the transmission of feelings of caring and intimacy vary widely across cultures, but can include verbal statements, touch, sharing of personal information and secrets and the performance of services by the supporter. In most

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[117] A.C. Acock, and T. Fuller, 'Standardisation in LISREL for Multiple Population Solutions', Sociological Methods and Research Volume 13 pp.551-557.

cases the significance is in the action itself rather than the content, for example, a gift or service could be made which has little material value but is seen as a token of the donor's love for the recipient.

2. Esteem - the expression of admiration and praise bolster self-esteem and make the person feel valued. The avoidance of negative comments will add to this effect.

3. Security - this depends on the building of trust within the network. It is likely that this would take place over a length of time and would consist of small movements from each member which demonstrate trusting and trustworthiness. Physical contact may play a crucial part in this, giving control of part of the body over to another in the ultimate expression of trust.

4. Appraisal - this must be seen to be impartial and non-judgmental, but with sufficient feedback to convince the individual that the listener cares about the outcome and can put their problems into context.

The impact of culture on the expression of these supportive behaviours cannot be underestimated, as the interpretation of actions could be seriously affected by attaching too much or too little importance to certain interactions. A warm hug could be seen to be the ultimate expression of support to a contemporary North American woman. However, a Japanese man would be likely to construe such an action as a breach of manners and regard it with great suspicion.

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[118] Cobb and Jones, pp. 50-51.

People with a strong psychological sense of support wherein they have received a high level of love, esteem, security and appraisal would be likely to face life events and transitions with composure. Their confidence comes from the belief that they have built up and can draw upon a well-established fund of support resulting in a less threatening assessment of the stress. Ironically, those who cope best will often not use their support networks because their psychological sense of well-being means that their intervention is not required.

Most studies have purposefully set out to identify the positive aspects of social networks. It is important however, that research includes information on conflictual relationships as well as beneficial ones, because when the network contains ties of negative affect it can act as a barrier, rather than a resource. In this context, social pressure must be distinguished from social support as social pressure often travels through the same networks, but is usually exerted on behalf of the community and acts as a constraint[119]. Social pressure is generally seen as part of the cost of social support.

Friendship

The majority of women's support networks appear to be informal which causes them to be categorised as "friendships". A major strand of social research specifically

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[119] *Cobb and Jones*, p. 52.

pertinent to women's support networks has been in the area of friendships. The enquiry into women's friendships has produced a sizeable body of work since the 1970s, when a concentrated study of personal relationships began. In this context, the effect of social support networks is concentrated firmly on the private lives of the individual and whether their close ties affect their health, well being and marital status. Studies of women have primarily intended to determine the possible benefit or detriment of social support networks to their physical and psychological health[120]. These friendship networks are situated in the private, personal realm of society where authority is given to official social structures traditionally under patriarchal control, such as marriage and the family.

Men are generally perceived as 'the ultimate mediators of "reality"'[121] and, as female friendship is not concerned with the realities of sex or money, there is a strong tendency to overlook its significance. Friendship is usually seen as peripheral to the rest of social organisation; it is presented as an optional extra which can improve the quality of life but is in no way an essential element[122]. Women's friendship in particular is normally dismissed as of little real importance as it is not concerned with economics or heterosexual relationships, the main areas of interest in western society. However, this ignores the fact that friendship is actually an

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[120] Cobb and Jones, p. 48.
[121] Raymond, p. 13.
[122] G. Allan, Friendship: Developing a Sociological Perspective, (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989) p.78.

institutionalised mode of social organisation[123]. Its apparent informality belies the complex structures and rules which govern successful and fulfilling friendships and make it an objectified social form.

Male friendship was idealised by Plato as the human relationship which could become nearest to perfection, with heterosexual relationships within marriage following a very poor second and women's friendship with other women ignored completely. Throughout the centuries there has been a popular cultural stereotype that women do not trust or like each other and that competition for men precludes the possibility of genuine friendship. However, research into female friendship in the 1970s discovered what Virginia Woolf had asserted much earlier in the century: 'Sometimes women do like women'[124]. Seiden and Bart found that 'the majority of women questioned had always had warm and significant relationships with other women'[125]. They reported however, that female friendships had often been regarded as outside the major area of action, 'something you do until the major relationship comes'[126]. Friendships with women were seen as a pastime, while relationships with men were viewed as an investment which might enhance marriage prospects.

Contemporary work on female friendships has analysed the "value" of these relationships and contrasted friendship patterns across class and gender

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[123] *O'Connor*, p. 8.
[124] V. Woolf, A Room of One's Own, (St Albans: Panther, 1977) p.78.
[125] *A.M., Seiden, and P. B., Bart, 'Woman to Woman: Is Sisterhood Powerful ?', in H.M. Seiden,* editor, Old Family, New Family, (London: Van Nostrand, 1975) p. 193.

boundaries. Friendship is perceived as a dynamic concept involving intimacy and power. Research has shown that women are more self-revealing than men, prompting assertions that 'their greater amenability to personal divulgence is symbolic of their submission to men and functions to establish and maintain male dominance'[127]. This is challenged however, by the idea that a one directional flow of confidence can also create a tyranny over the person obliged to listen. Reciprocity functions when confidences are made by social equals, as confiding behaviour can place the power with the confidant, necessitating a return of confidence to restore the balance of power. The major function of friendship is seen to be the validation of a person's self-concept through the support and understanding of the other person[128]. It is therefore most important to those under pressure or attack for beliefs or activities which place them outside the mainstream and who therefore lack validation from society. Research into feminists' friendships in the 1980s found that the women felt their feminist beliefs had enabled them to cross class and age barriers in their friendships, allowed them to benefit from emotional support from other women, and also created a substitute kinship network[129].

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[126] *Seiden*, p. 193.
[127] H.M. Hacker, 'Blabbermouths and Clams: Sex Differences in Self-Disclosure in Same-Sex and Cross-Sex Friendship Dyads', Psychology of Women Quarterly Volume 5 (3) 1981, p. 387.
[128] Hacker, p. 386.
[129] S. Rose, and L. Roades, , 'Feminism and Women's Friendships', Psychology of Women Quarterly Volume 11 1987, p. 245.

The fact that the contemporary study focused on feminists does not indicate that women must have feminist beliefs to create such relationships, as the study found little difference between the friendships of feminists and non-feminists, concluding that:

> it could be that feminist and non-feminist friendships are similar because the tradition of female friendships as highly intimate and supportive predates contemporary feminism.[130]

Feminist writers have, however, begun to examine female friendships and their function within society, looking analytically at the responses to women's relationships. The perpetuation of the idea that women could not trust each other and are more likely to be in competition with other women than to co-operate with them is seen to serve a purpose within a patriarchal society as it reinforces women's dependence on men - if women cannot trust each other then they must rely on men[131].

On the island of Desirade[132], a Guadeloupean dependency, in the 1970s, women were able to express very limited support towards each other and what support was offered was on the basis of kinship, not friendship. There were few opportunities for women to freely associate and when they did they could be

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[130] Rose and Roades, p. 253. Lilian Faderman's study of female friendship would verify this to a certain extent. Surpassing the Love of Men, (London: Women's Press, 1991) traces a history of intimate female relationships from the Early Modern period, but concentrates mainly on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

[131] Seiden and Bart, p. 194.

[132] J. Naish, 'Desirade: a Negative Case', in P. Caplan and J. Bujra, Women: Women United, Women Divided, (London: Tavistock, 1978) pp. 238-258.

accused of gossip. The restrictions on women's autonomy, initiative and decision-making were compounded by physical segregation from each other at work and at home, forcing them to locate their social identity in terms of dependency upon men. Women would normally stay at home with their children who would do most of the shopping and errands. There was no market and the architecture of the houses, with high walls, enclosed courtyards and no outward facing windows, added to the physical isolation.

Men tended to actively discourage women from befriending other women by suggesting that the other woman was a gossip, promiscuous or lazy: 'notions of treachery and jealousy militate against friendship'[133]. Women said that they had friends at school but not since leaving. Gossip was used as a social control for women as if they went outside the home to chat they would be called a "macerate", someone who gossips, although it was acceptable for the men to sit around on the streets and chat without censure. Women were only able to meet together in church activities which were held by the priest, and characterised by jealousy and rivalry. An attempt to develop a prayer group of women who rotated a statue within the houses of its members failed because of competition to see which one would have the highest attendance. The women were socialised into not wanting women friends because it was assumed that they would be hypocritical and the woman herself would be accused of gossiping. Therefore their meetings were seen as arenas

where they would represent their husbands (only married women were able to participate) and the pressure to maintain his reputation within the community was paramount.

The strength of these social controls provides an indication of the power that women might have if they were able to group together, as if there was no threat to the ruling ideology, there would be no reason to impose such severe and stringent controls. By isolating women from their contemporaries, the society prevents the development of any solidarity and enforces their dependency on men.

Reciprocity

Van Baal defines reciprocity as 'doing or rendering something in return for a good received, an act committed or an evil inflicted'[134]. It is an exchange with connotations of relative equality or equivalence and in Western culture is seen as the basic principle or desired behaviour in interpersonal relations. The development of work on reciprocity came initially from anthropologists in the early twentieth century. Malinowski's work in the Western Pacific highlighted the function of reciprocity in creating a network of rights and obligations which generated social cohesion[135]. Gifts of material goods or assistance were seen to be given under a social contract

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[133] *Naish, pp. 240-241.*
[134] J. Van Baal, Reciprocity and the Position of Women: Anthropological Papers, (Amsterdam: *Koninkljke Van Gorcum, 1975) p. 11.*
[135] Van Baal, p. 22.

between the two people involved. The exchange bound groups and individuals together and the circulation of goods combined with the establishment of the rights of the individual. In a study of the North-western American Indians, Mauss noted that:

> what they exchange are not exclusively goods and valuables, personal and real property, objects which are economically useful...these are courtesies, banquets, rites, military assistance, women, children, dances, feasts...the circulation of wealth is only one of the ends of a contract which is far more permanent.[136]

The gifts presented were given voluntarily but they were also completely obligatory with whole groups and clans involved. Levi-Strauss[137] suggested that gift exchange was not at all geared to the acquisition of benefits or economic advantage, but was more directed towards social gains such as winning power, sympathy, status or emotion. Goods were exchanged for the purpose of establishing or strengthening the tie between the persons or groups that made the exchange as it obliged the givers to continue their relationship and behave as partners, not individual parties - a balanced reciprocity suggested social equality. It is in this respect that gift-giving differs from trade where there is no obligation beyond the initial transaction. Reciprocity acts as a form of communication between two agents in a way which is latent, informal and generalised and in which each maintains their own separate identity. Communication is identical with the gift itself: 'the exchange affirms that the

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[136] M. Mauss, , 'Essai sur le Don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les Sociétés archaïques'. Quoted in Van Baal, p. 25.

giver and recipient are integral parts of their universe'[138]. The idea of reciprocity remains unspoken unless problems arise in which case the rejected member of the group would dispute membership and the value of the benefits of that membership.

Lomnitz identified the rules of informal networks as being very strict and based on a system of honour[139]. The networks she studied consisted of a system of reciprocity involving a continuing exchange of complimentary services within an ideology of kinship and friendship among the middle classes. Lomnitz's research concentrates on Chile, where it was assumed that the system was egalitarian, as 'anybody has friends and relatives'[140]. The favours or gifts given in this system included job placement, waivers of priorities, bureaucratic favouritism and social introductions to people who could assist in such matters. Services were not performed for material gain, but were provided by social equals who were aware of the benefit that the favour may bring to themselves in the future. The agreement was not explicit but there remained a debt of honour which could be payable at any time. Restrictions on the unspoken agreement included sexual favours and repayment in cash. In this society, material payment for favours was not acceptable unless there was no possibility of the people involved having any sort of personal relationship or having friends in common. Compliance with these rules was essential if the middle

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[137] *Van Baal*, p. 31.
[138] Van Baal, p. 66.
[139] Lomnitz, p.43.
[140] Lomnitz, p. 43.

classes were to retain their control of public and private administration; the reciprocal exchange of favours was the mark of middle class status[141]. The networks which comprised the middle class in Chile at this time relied totally on reciprocity and the mutual solidarity necessary to make the system work.

While reciprocity acts as a force for social cohesion, deviation from the prescribed rules can challenge the prevailing ideology and create chaos. The rules can be ignored by individual members, obscured, curtailed or overruled by publicly recognised dictates of hierarchy, competition, power, charity or communality. The significance of these deviations can be seen in both the reasons for their occurrence and their effect on the society in which they happen. The other negative application of reciprocity is in the action of revenge, which can be seen as a natural reaction of a victim to an attack or perceived attack which has been taken as a negation of the victim's position in society. Unlike the positive side of reciprocity, however, revenge is unbalanced as the victim must hit back harder. The victim must be transformed into the victor and superiority must have been demonstrated by giving back more than was given. Private revenge has a damaging effect on community life and if revenge is inflicted immediately it tends to be in excess of the insult. The application of the rule of "eye for an eye" can be seen to result in weakening of the group. The solution is often found in the payment of *wereguild*, a substantial gift as payment for the insult.

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[141] Lomnitz, p. 44.

If no guilty person is obvious or immediately available, a scapegoat may be found which will satisfy the need of the victim for retribution, so that a reciprocal action can be seen to have been taken and the dominant ideology reasserted. In cases of a catastrophe in which no one person can be blamed, a scapegoat is commonly used to provide a method of payment for perceived wrongdoing by the whole community. In West Africa, a person would have been selected to embody evil and provide a focus for spiritual impurity which could be destroyed with that person. In the Niger Delta up to the early twentieth century, young slave girls were sacrificed for the sake of the people[142]. A slave girl would be brought to the village, tied hand and foot and dragged face downwards through the village while her tormentors called out "Evil! Evil!". The occupants of each hut would throw sticks and pebbles at the victim while shouting out for all evil to go with the sacrifice who would be drowned in the river, illustrating the idea that evil could be personified in one person whose destruction will "pay" the debt of the community in one go.

After an assessment of the most relevant theories it would seem that the most effective way to examine women's support networks in early modern England would be to describe their function and development alongside analysis of their role in an historical context. Many of the theories used to study contemporary women's support networks are clearly applicable to the early modern period. Whilst it would be unwise to merely transfer them wholesale to historical research, the analytical structures

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[142] G. Bollinder, Devil Man's Jungle, (London: Dennis Dobson, 1954) pp. 124-127.

they provide can be used to clarify and enliven the presentation of evidence and argument. There seems to be a need to draw together the separate strands to provide a more integrated approach to the study of the individuals who make up the networks without losing sight of their impact as a group on each other and wider society. This would prevent studies becoming purely celebratory and involve examining conflictual relationships within networks which may act as a barrier to both individuals and the group as a whole.

The acceptance of the role of informal activities in affecting official systems appears to allocate some power and influence to those who would initially be seen as impotent. The tendency of some networks to cross the boundaries of age and social status indicates an alternative structure and hierarchy to other groups within the same time period. Highlighting the role of friendships as codified social systems emphasises their importance in a society that was just beginning to develop more formal methods of organisation and provides alternative power structures for those denied official influence. Network analysis can help to identify these systems in a methodical way from a variety of sources and assist in the analysis of their function and development. It would seem that the principles can be easily transferred to early modern England where codes of honour and reciprocity were essential to normal social relations. The ideas which have been developed to aid the understanding of

contemporary women's networks emphasise the importance of such groups when attempting to gain insight into how society has functioned on all levels.

This study will approach women's networks using the ideas outlined in this chapter. It will discover where the networks reside in the formal/informal social system and discuss the implications of their placement. Network analysis will be used to identify and dissect the networks, looking at the advantages and disadvantages that might be expected from particular networks, and whether these are shown to be so in the specific case discussed. The way in which the networks function will be analysed using ideas of reciprocity, exchange and honour, and the effect of this on the network members will be considered. Examples of conflict and discord will be examined to see if the balance between social pressure and social support had been disrupted in any way, or if the disruption had originated externally. The theories which have been developed to aid the understanding of contemporary women's networks emphasise the importance of these groups when attempting to gain an insight into how society functions on all levels.

Chapter 3
Women's personal networks - Alice Thornton and Lady Anne Clifford

The family, church and state were the main formal organisations in early modern England and they each provided certain support functions. As social structures, they were officially regulated by law and conformed to a recognisable model. For example, the state was made up of the king/queen as head of state, the law courts and parliament. Power was delegated to local bodies by laws enforced by the state. Personal networks, although likely to contain some input from members of formal networks, were much more fluid and were regulated by codes of socially acceptable behaviour rather than officially sanctioned legislature. They provided practical and emotional support specifically aimed at an individual by using informal social processes such as reciprocity, exchange and honour. Women's personal networks did not have clearly defined objectives, but they did have recognisable characteristics[143].

This chapter will discuss the personal networks of two early modern women - Alice Thornton and to a lesser extent, Lady Anne Clifford. Although the use of women of relatively high social status could be questioned, they were chosen because of the wealth of detailed information that they left about their day-to-day

lives and relationships with other women. No single woman at this time, or any other, could be said to be representative of her gender, as each had their own individual life experiences. However, both Alice Thornton and Lady Anne Clifford wrote accounts of their lives that give sufficient detail to allow comparison across time, region and life cycle. Although their lives were privileged to a certain extent, they were both subject to swings in fortune due to their gender, marital status and the effects of the political system in seventeenth-century England and Ireland. The challenges they faced throw their personal networks into sharp relief and clearly expose the strengths and weaknesses of formal and informal support structures.

Alice Thornton[144] (née Wandesford) was born in 1626 to a wealthy gentry family with estates in Yorkshire. Her mother was heiress to one of the richest citizens of London. Her father was an M.P. and cousin of the Earl of Strafford, a prominent figure at the court of Charles I. He was sent to Ireland as Lord Deputy in the early 1630s. One of seven children, Alice Thornton received a good education and associated with other wealthy young women, including Stafford's daughters. She spent most of her life in rural Yorkshire apart from the period when her father took

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[143] See chapter 2, p.52.

[144] M. George, 'The Pity of Alice Thornton', in George, Women in the First Capitalist Society, (London: Harvester press, 1988) pp.168-179; R. Anselment, 'The Deliverances of Alice Thornton: the Recreation of a Seventeenth Century Life', Prose Studies Volume 19 no. 1 April 1996 pp.19-36. Alice Thornton, The Autobiography of Mrs Alice Thornton of East Newton, County York, C. Jackson, editor, (Durham: Surtees Society, 1873).

his family to Ireland. Her father's death in 1640 was swiftly followed by the start of civil war in Ireland and England and the family's flight from Ireland back to England, the death of Alice's elder sister in childbirth, her brother's death by drowning and Alice's marriage. The family suffered a significant loss of financial security that was partially resolved by the reluctant marriage of Alice to William Thornton in 1651. Between 1654 and 1667 Alice had nine children, of whom three survived their first year of life. William Thornton died in 1668, leaving Alice in dire financial straits. She oversaw the marriage of her children and lived in "genteel poverty"[145] at the family home in East Newton until her own death in 1706.

Lady Anne Clifford[146] was born in 1590, daughter of George, the third Earl of Cumberland and Margaret Russell, daughter of the second Earl of Bedford. Her parents had two sons, both of whom died in infancy, leaving Lady Anne the only heir to the family estates and titles. However, her father had left a will which instead gave them to his brother. After the Earl of Cumberland's funeral, Lady Anne's mother launched a challenge to her husband's will, an action which came to define her

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[145]George, p. 178.

[146] K.O. Acheson, The Diary of Lady Anne Clifford 1616-1619, (New York: Garland, 1995). Lady Anne Clifford, 'In the yeare of our Lord 1603...' in W. Seward, editor, Anecdotes of Some distinguished Persons, Volume 1 (London: 1795) pp.141-156. Lady Anne Clifford, The Diary of Lady Anne Clifford, V. Sackville-West, editor, (London: William Heinemann, 1923). Lady Anne Clifford, The Diaries of Lady Anne Clifford, Editor D.J.H. Clifford, (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1990). H. Wilcox, 'Private Writing and Public Function: Autobiographical Texts by Renaissance Englishwomen', in S.P. Cerasano and M. Wynne-Davies, editors, Gloriana's Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992). M.E. Lamb, 'The Agency of the Split Subject: Lady Anne Clifford and the Uses of Reading', English Literary Renaissance 22 1992. B.K. Lewalski, Writing Women in Jacobean England, (London: Harvard University Press, 1993), also Writing Women and Reading in the Renaissance, Renaissance Quarterly 44 1991.

daughter's life. Lady Anne married Richard Sackville, Earl of Dorset and they had three sons who died in infancy and surviving daughters Margaret and Isabella. Following Sackville's death in 1624, Lady Anne was remarried to Phillip Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and they had two sons who also died. When she eventually came into her inheritance Lady Anne lived on her Cumbrian estates until her death in 1676 at the age of eighty six.

In early modern Europe, the movement away from the feudalism of the Middle Ages was marked by the development of different forms of government and social organisation. The centralisation and bureaucratisation of government combined with the growth of national monarchies created formal, male-dominated institutions from which women were legally and culturally excluded[147]. State policy was formulated to target those who were perceived to be most threatening to public order, particularly single women and the mothers of illegitimate children.

> The introduction of the Poor Law and the reformation of manners drew on the active participation not just of the gentry, but of the respectable middling sort, and the influence of these people ensured that the civil, ecclesiastical and criminal law too, were active bulwarks against the perceived threats to social order[148]

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[147] S. Kettering, 'The Patronage Power of Early Modern French Noblewomen', Historical Journal Volume 32 1989, p. 817.
[148] Braddick, p. 172.

The systems of law and government created in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England had the effect of separating women from the official management of their communities. Their enforced reliance on men made their use of informal power systems essential. Laguerre has suggested that the more a social system is formally regulated, the more likely it is to create informal arrangements which operate at the margins, or outside of that system (see Figure 3) [149].

Natalie Zemon Davis has identified the development of the patriarchal family as a factor in the reduction of autonomy for women in France at this time. She suggested that the family 'streamlined itself for more efficient property acquisition, social mobility, and preservation of the line'[150]. The emphasis placed on the patriarchal family by King James I in early seventeenth century England must certainly have added to the pressure on organisations to exclude women. Laurence has noted that:

> Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the opportunities for women to serve in various offices and to exercise limited political rights diminished[151].

The transfer of local administration to common law, combined with a reduction in women being accepted in public life meant that the role of women was marginalised and increasingly restricted to the domestic. Whilst it is not being suggested that the

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[149] Laguerre, p.5.
[150] N.Z. Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France, p. 126.
[151] Laurence, p. 241.

previous centuries were a golden age for women, it would appear that the seventeenth century saw an expansion in the official institutions which opposed their public activities. However, as both Kettering and Lewalski have discovered in studies of French and English Court circles respectively:

> the networks dominating noble society were informal, fluid, non-institutional and well suited to the exercise of indirect power through personal relationships by women[152]

It would appear that their exclusion from formal social organisations did not automatically lead to the disempowerment of women at this time.

The more closely controlled women's lives became, the more likely they were to find ways to circumvent the restrictions placed upon them. When the lines between official and unofficial roles and duties for women were blurred, or deliberately ill-defined, fewer of their activities were placed in informal social structures as they could function adequately within the parameters of the official systems. Once formal society became more closely determined by law, women's activities were pushed outwards into the informal system. Many women found that using their personal networks was the most effective way to influence events and protect their own interests in such a society. The informal structure of these networks has meant that they have remained hidden, however.

Robertson highlighted the difficulties in identifying women's personal networks in her essay on Lady Ralegh:

> while men's connections in early modern England were often marked by formal legal instruments such as indenture or guild membership, women's groupings were often more informal and less frequently documented[153]

Robertson used the information on the back of one single letter to discuss Lady Ralegh's attempts to use her networks to prevent further disaster when her husband, Sir Walter, was arrested for treason and imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1603. The more extensive writings and personal documents of Alice Thornton and Lady Anne Clifford provide much more evidence that women 'were aware of and could turn to kinship alliances constructed through the female line'[154].

The effect of public disorder on the life of an individual was considerable in the mid seventeenth century, when the English Civil War brought conflict and upheaval to thousands of people across the country. Although the battles of the opposing armies were undoubtedly the main destructive events, the uncertainty and insecurity of a disrupted state system would seem to have affected individuals in a different way. After the death of Alice Thornton's father in the early 1640s the family's influence waned considerably. In fact, it would seem that the loss of her father caused an immediate drop in protection for Alice and her family, coinciding with a time when the English state descended into chaos. On the same page in her

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[152] Kettering, p. 818, Lewalski, pp. 1-11.
[153] *Robertson, p. 149.*
[154] Robertson, p. 160.

'Book of Remembrances' Alice described the death of her father 'who departed sweetly in ye Lord', followed immediately in her account by the fact that she was:

> amongst ye many 1000 of other Protestants in Ireland miraculously preserved from ye horrid rebellion... wth bitter malice & fury against ye English[155]

The contrast between the peace and security of life with her father, to being forced to flee Ireland emphasised her loss and the reduced circumstances in which the family found themselves. On their way home to Yorkshire, Alice and her family found that: 'we were prevented from ye seige at Yorke by Mr Danbys advice beeing got halfe way thither'[156]. The English Civil War made the countryside unsafe for travel and difficult for the bereaved Thorntons to negotiate. Once at Hipswell, the family home, they were forced to move again to take refuge with Alice's sister:

> for it beeing in the heate of warres,[they] could not live at Hipswell...which was molested sometimes with the parliaments, and then with the king's forces[157]

Formal authority was disrupted and ordinary people were reliant on the protection of soldiers who were able to use or abuse their power for their own ends.

The idea that all individuals were provided for within formal institutions and systems has serious flaws. Formal organisations had a limited and often biased approach to social support. Even when state authority was not disputed, the law

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[155] Alice Thornton, A Booke of remembrances of all the remarkable deliverances of my selfe, Husband & Children wth theire births, & other remarks as conserning my selfe & Family beginning from the yeare, 1625, MSS, p. 21.
[156] Thornton, Remembrances, p. 22.

often gave women no protection. Alice Thornton was given no financial protection or independence by law and she had to fight to retain control of the money she inherited from her mother. In her 'Book of Remembrances' she related an incident in which she had decided to spend some of her money on livestock. Although in her manuscript part of the page has been cut away, it appears that her husband was displeased and this lead to heavily pregnant Alice being threatened by him with a knife. By law, her finances may have been protected, but the reality of marriage meant that a woman had to be incredibly strong-willed to retain control of money or land, the tokens of power[158]. Alice Thornton gave up her idea of buying livestock with her own money because her husband did not agree and he had threatened her.

It was quite common for a woman's rights in law to be ignored or simply discounted and for this view to be supported by the state. Lady Anne Clifford took on the task of fighting for her rightful inheritance after her mother's death. Her father had left his estate to Anne's uncle, thereby denying his daughter the lands due to her by a writ issued in the reign of Edward II. The writ entailed lands and titles to direct heirs, whether male or female. Lady Anne Clifford's mother, Margaret Russell, began legal proceedings to assert her daughter's right to the inheritance[159] after her husband's death. Against the strongest persuasion, Lady Anne and her mother held

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[157] Alice Thornton, The Autobiography of Mrs Alice Thornton of East Newton, County York, p. 39.
[158] *For a full consideration of these issues see* A. Erickson, Women and Property in Early Modern England, (London: Routledge, 1993).
[159] *Clifford, p. 14.*

out by maintaining their solidarity. The women contrived between themselves to frustrate the plans of the king, judges and statesmen to deny Lady Anne Clifford her lands. She related that:

> Much persuasion was used by [the Archbishop]... sometimes terrifying me and sometimes flattering me, but at length it was concluded that I should have leave to go to my mother.... Upon the 12th I told my Lord how I had left those writings which the judges would have me sign and seal behind with my mother.[160]

The refusal of Lady Anne Clifford and her mother to co-operate with the men who wanted to take the land and titles out of her control was a direct threat to the ideology of patriarchal rule. The family was perceived as the basic unit of an orderly society at this time and much was made of the idea that the male head of household was expected to maintain order within the home. Just as the king was God's representative on earth, so the father/husband was the king's deputy in the home and therefore the family were expected to obey him in the same way a subject would be expected to obey the monarch. The murder of a man by his wife was petty treason, rather than ordinary homicide, as if the husband were the king being attacked by his subject. In this way the family became an arm of the state. The head of household became an officer of the state with responsibility for maintaining order within the family[161]. The threat a woman posed in challenging the authority of her husband was translated into an assault on wider society by the husband's

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[160] Clifford, pp. 250-251.
[161] See discussion of the state in the introduction p. 11.

association with the state, the monarch and through him, to God[162]. It was therefore in the interest of the king to ensure that Lady Anne Clifford followed her husband's wishes:

> [King James] put out all that were there, & my Lord and I kneeled by his chair side, when he persuaded us both to Peace, & to put the Whole Matter wholly into his hands. Which my Lord consented to, but I beseech'd His Majesty to pardon me for that I would never part with Westmoreland while I lived upon any Condition whatsoever.
>
> Sometimes he used fair means and persuasions, & sometimes foul means, but I was resolved before so as nothing would move me[163]

The personal interest of the King indicated the importance he placed on Lady Anne's compliance with her husband's wishes. Although she felt that the law and the machinery of the state should uphold her rightful claim to her inheritance, the King, as head of state, did not provide support and actively worked against her.

The benefits of a strong religious faith bolstered both Lady Anne Clifford and Alice Thornton, but the church did not provide the sort of personal support that they often needed. Life in eastern Yorkshire in the seventeenth century was characterised by its isolation and even now, East Newton is well away from any large centres of population. Religion gave Alice Thornton a personal faith and belief which helped to sustain her in the face of adversity. The practical care which might have been expected to exist through the church, whereby the local parishioners cared for the sick and needy does not appear to have extended as far as Mrs

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[162] P. Crawford, Women and Religion in England 1500-1720, pp.48-52.
[163] *Clifford, p. 45.*

Thornton, however. It is possible that her social status excluded Alice from the sort of visit which may have been paid to those who were poorer, as an act of charity. There was no permanent minister at East Newton during the early years that Alice lived there. The pastoral care and spiritual guidance which a clergyman could have provided was absent until the arrival of Thomas Comber filled the vacant post. Alice Thornton's physical distance from her own family and friends left her 'exposed as a stranger to the severall humours and factious spirits, which was altogether fixed amongst whome I lived'[164]. She felt that the predominance of Catholicism in the area meant that she 'could not be any way acceptable to any of the other dissentours when [she] first came hither to Oswaldkirk'[165]. Indeed, Alice had difficulties in receiving Holy Communion due to the lack of Protestant clergy and frequently went years without the attentions of an ordained minister.

The practical difficulties of relying on a clergyman from Richmond must have significantly reduced the support effect of the church as it is over 25 miles from East Newton. Alice related that following her sister's death in childbirth she baptised the surviving child herself: 'my sister Danby died at Thorpe Sept 10th 1648: of her childe, beeing aforenamed Francis w^ch^ I baptised'[166]. In a later account, the date of her sister's death was given as September 30th 1645 and she 'was buried that night...in the night, by reason of the parliament sett and Scots, who would not let a sermon be

[164] Thornton, Autobiography, p.213.
[165] Thornton, Autobiography, p. 216.

preached'[167]. Alice was forced to baptise her nephew herself and the death rituals which would normally have been a source of comfort and support to the family were curtailed[168]. It would appear that the choice of collective religious worship was denied to Alice Thornton at significant points in her life by political circumstance and rural living.

One of the disadvantages of looking at women's role in society through formal social systems is that, because the systems in the seventeenth century were organised from a patriarchal angle, women tend to be viewed as disadvantaged victims. However strongly Anne Clifford may have held out against state persuasion, she eventually came into her rightful inheritance because her uncle died without leaving a legitimate male heir to continue to displace her claim. The battle to gain her inheritance through the mechanics of the state did not succeed. When seen individually women can appear defensive and isolated, fighting against the authority of those in power. However, if the analysis looks further than official structures, their situation can appear very different.

Chapter 2 discussed the commonly accepted myth, perpetuated throughout the ages, that women could not trust each other and were more likely to compete

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[166] Thornton, Remembrances, p.22.
[167] Thornton, Autobiography, p. 53.
[168] For further consideration of the importance of death rituals see R. Houlbrooke, Death, Ritual and Bereavement, (London: Routledge, 1989), idem, Death, Religion and the Family in England 1480-1750,(Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1998) and D. Cressey, Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion and Life Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) .

than co-operate with each other[169]. This idea can be seen to serve a purpose within a patriarchal society. If women believed that they could not trust each other, then they were forced to rely on men, making them dependent and therefore in a subordinate position[170]. However, this idea can also be reversed so that if in reality women cannot rely on men or the social systems that they create, then women must rely on and trust each other. Social status would appear to have little bearing on the extent to which the state supported women. Houlbrooke and Capp have both given examples of female solidarity against the encroachment of the state. Capp suggests that:

> women had no recognised standing the public sphere, and therefore no formal place in the hierarchy of public authority[171].

The focus for visible female protest may have differed as women of lower social status appear in the records rising up together against circumstances that threatened their basic survival. Their mode of expression may have been different to that of more wealthy women but it would seem that the stimulus for protest was generally an attack on their rights and freedoms.

In the case of Lady Anne Clifford's conflict with King James I, the pressure from the male head of state was countered to a certain extent by support from the Queen: 'The Queen gave me a warning not to trust my matters absolutely to the King

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[169] Chapter 2, p. 57-58.
[170] This can be seen in the case of Desirade, discussed in chapter 2, p.58-59.
[171] Capp, p.137.

lest he should deceive me'[172]. This advice proved very useful when Lady Anne was again sent for by the king:

> the door was lock'd & nobody suffered to stay here but my Lord & I, my Uncle Cumberland, my coz. Clifford, my Lords Arundel, Pembroke, Montgomery & Sir John Digby....The King asked us all if we would submit to his Judgement in this case...but I never would without Westmoreland, at which the King grew in a great Chaffe[173].

If Lady Anne had entrusted her affairs to the King as head of state, then without doubt she would have lost her lands and titles. However, the warning from Queen Anne prevented her from assenting to the King's request and made her more aware of the lengths to which he would go to keep the Clifford properties in the hands of her uncle. In the summary of her life in one of the 'Great Books', Lady Anne wrote that:

> James began to shew himselfe extreamly against my mother and me...though his wife Queene Anne was ever inclyneing to our part, and very favourable and gracious to us[174].

Although it might seem that she was isolated in her efforts to gain her inheritance, Lady Anne Clifford had a powerful ally in the Queen and the ladies of her court[175]. The scope and range of the women supporting Lady Anne Clifford can be identified in those who were reported as performing with the Queen in her court masques. In 'The Masque of Beautie' (1608) there were sixteen masquers, all chosen by the

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[172] Clifford, p. 45.
[173] Clifford, p. 47.
[174] Lady Anne Clifford, Great Book, volume 3 Mss, Cumbria County Record Office, Kendal, p. 224.

Queen. A subsequent performance of 'The Masque of Queenes' (1609) by ten ladies of Queen Anne's court included at least eight of those who performed in 'The Mask of Beautie'[176]. Lady Anne Clifford played a key part in both performances which suggests that these may have been some of the women who supported her at court. Jonson made it clear in his published text that it was Queen Anne who controlled and instigated the masques. Lewalski has argued that 'the Queen fought hard to choose her own court and household officers'[177], in opposition to the King. She was thought to favour those women who went to meet her on her progress to England, among them Lady Anne Clifford and her mother:

> the next day we went to Mr Griffin's at Dingleys which was the first time I ever saw the Queen & Prince Henry when she kissed us all & used us kindly....That night we went along with the Queen's Train[178].

The commitment shown to the new Queen in the first weeks of her reign would appear to have had long-lasting benefits to Lady Anne Clifford, as it ensured her inclusion in the personal network of the Queen.

Queen Anne's relocation to England in 1603 provides an example of the creation of a new personal network. She fought to retain the services of those she knew were trustworthy and included those English women who had demonstrated

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[175] Lewalski, pp. 136-138.
[176] Lewalski lists those involved in the 'Mask of Beautie' as Lucy, Countess of Bedford; Countess of Derby; Susan de Vere, Countess of Montgomery; Lady Walsingham; Arabella Stuart; Elizabeth Hatton; Lady Anne Clifford; Alatheia Howard; the four daughters of the Earl of Worcester, Elizabeth Guildford, Katherine Petre, Anne Winter, Catherine Windsor; Frances, Lady Chicester; Lady Mary Neville; Lady Elizabeth Gerard. Lewalski, pp.33-38.
[177] Lewalski, p.22.

loyalty to their new Queen. Queen Anne recognised the need to create her own society within the royal court:

> The masques and entertainments the Queen produced or sponsored affirmed the worth of women, and her court was perceived as a separate female community, marginalised but yet powerful.[179]

Her choice of friends and personal servants gave her an opportunity create a power base from which she challenged the increasingly patriarchal government of her husband:

> the Queen's presence and court provided a locus, unstable but yet influential, of female resistance to Jacobean patriarchy.[180]

Lewalski has suggested that the Queen's choice of court and household officers and close friends was grounded in oppositional politics[181]. She attempted to protect her own interests and those of her son, Prince Henry, by surrounding herself with influential and sympathetic people who might be able to help her to counter moves by King James and his favourites to dis-empower her. Lewalski suggests that:

> The Queen's oppositional attitudes and gestures of resistance arose chiefly from her desire to assert her own value and importance as something more than James's Queen.[182]

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[178] Clifford, p.23.
[179] Lewalski, p.43.
[180] Lewalski, p.18.
[181] Lewalski, p.22-23.
[182] Lewalski, p.18.

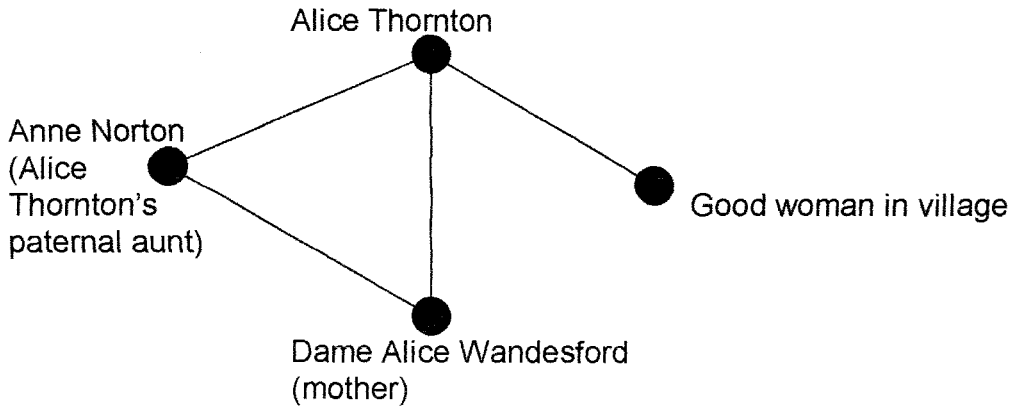
Queen Anne's support of Lady Anne Clifford's resistance to King James helped a friend in difficulties, but also provided a challenge to the king's ideas about the proper place of his queen as stated in his text *Basilikon Doron*:

> Ye are the head, shee in your body; It is your office to command, and hers to obey....suffer her never to meddle with the Politicke government of the Commonewale

On the surface, the Queen was seen to support her husband as she did not publicly oppose him, but she was able to exert influence informally.

Formal systems have been shown to be of limited benefit to women in early modern England. It could be suggested that at times of crisis people would automatically come to the assistance of others, and therefore the women's networks which became visible at a time of trauma or great need were there only at that time. This does not appear to be the case, however. Figure 4 shows the support pathways open to Alice Thornton in 1643. Alice and her mother had returned from Ireland to Yorkshire following her father's death. They were vulnerable to 'the madnes of the Scots who quartered all the country over' and in particular to the advances of Captain Innis who attempted to be quartered in the Thornton household. His approach to Alice's Aunt Norton with an offer of 'all he was worth if she could procure [Alice] to be his wife'[183] was most unwelcome, but with the absence of the patriarchal head of household, the women lacked the authority to force him to desist in his efforts.

Figure 2 : Alice Thornton under attack by Scots during the civil war 1643-44



This was clearly a traumatic episode in which Alice needed maximum support, but her writings emphasise just how exposed and unsupported she was at this time.

Either George or Christopher, her brothers, should have been the head of household, but they were both in hiding following defeat at the Battle of Hessom Moor, when they had supported the Royalist cause. The women were left isolated and vulnerable in the midst of civil war. Family groups were often assumed to be the primary support for individuals at this time. In Alice Thornton's childhood and early life it would appear that Alice's contact with her parents was limited, although she wrote that she was educated:

> in ye true faith by my Pieous & Religious Parents, who instilld ye principalls of his Grace into me wth my milke[184]

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[183] Thornton, Autobiography, p.45.
[184] Thornton, Remembrances, p.8.

When she suffered from a 'surfit of some ill dejested meate' aged six years, Alice had been: 'left at Richmond in... ye care & deare love of my beloved Aunt Norton upon my fathers goeing to London'[185]. Later in the same year when recovering from small pox, she spent time at 'one Mr Baxters house where we were being much beloved & taken caire for by them'[186].

This kind of upbringing was not unusual at this time, particularly in families of a higher social status where attendance at court or on business necessitated long periods away from the family home. Lawrence Stone has suggested that parents did not become too attached to children at this time, as the very high child mortality rates:

> made it folly to invest too much emotional capital in such ephemeral beings....very many fathers seemed to have looked upon their children with much the same degree of affection which men today bestow on domestic pets[187].

However, this view was disputed by Houlbrooke who insisted that 'physical absence did not end parental concern any more than it does today'[188]. It does appear that Alice Thornton felt loved and wanted by her parents: 'I injoyed great happinesse & comfort during my fathers life'[189]. What this suggests however, is that although there

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[185] Thornton, Remembrances, p.10.
[186] Thornton, Remembrances, p.12. Tadmor , Family and Friends in Eighteenth Century England, pp. 18-35, discusses the inclusion in "family" of those not related by blood or kin.
[187] L. Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800, (London: Penguin, 1977) p.82.
[188] R. A. Houlbrooke, The English Family 1450-1700, (London: Longman, 1984) p.151.
[189] Thornton, Remembrances, p.16.

was a caring relationship, the immediate family did not provide for all the needs of its members and it was common for others to provide support services[190].

Neither family, state nor religion offered the protection the Thornton women needed when faced with the threats of the 'ernest and violent'[191] Captain Innis. He intimidated Alice's mother and forced her to tell Alice: 'go wither you would to secure yourself'[192]. She appeared to have had no other friends or family who were available to help, so she hid in the town.

> I...ran into the toune, and hid myselfe privatly in great feare and a fright with a good old woman of her tenants, where, I bles God, I continued safely til the visit was over....Affter which time this villaine captaine did study to be revenged of my dear mother, and threatened cruelly what he would doe to her because she hid me[193].

It may be assumed that the woman who provided her with temporary lodgings was financially reimbursed, as no mention of her name or any other connections with the family was made and she was described as a landlady.

This network was very sparse, possibly showing to some extent the fragmentation of gentry society during the Civil War. The age range was wide, with Alice aged 17 years and her mother aged 51 years. It is unclear exactly how old

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[190] Stone's thesis on the affective family has many critics, particularly those who disagree with his ideas on parent-child relations. See K. Wrightson, English Society 1580-1680, (London: Hutchinson, 1982), L. Pollock, Forgotten children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500-1900, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983)C. Durston, The Family in the English Revolution, (Oxford: Basil Balckwell), and P. Ariès, Centuries of Childhood, (London 1962) which pre-dates Stone's writing on this subject.
[191] Thornton, Remembrances, p. 44.
[192] Thornton, Remembrances, p.45.
[193] Thornton, Remembrances, p. 45

Anne Norton was at this time, but she was a younger sister of Christopher Wandesford and she had a daughter aged 10 years, therefore it can be assumed she was not much older than 40 years of age. The woman in the village was categorised as 'old'; although this vague description could cover anything from the age of thirty five upwards. It is probably only significant that the woman was a great deal older than Alice. The ties between the network members were strong in the case of Alice's mother and aunt, but weak in the case of the woman in the village as she was an acquaintance rather than a close friend or relative. Although size alone is not an adequate indicator of the effectiveness of social networks[194], this example shows that Alice Thornton's network was too limited in range to offer protection against the power and authority of the Scots officers.

Cobb and Jones have suggested that, 'social support moderates the relationship between certain life stresses and the strains resulting from them'[195]. In a short space of time Alice was subject to a number of the major life stresses recognised as threatening to physical and mental health. She had suffered the death of a close relative, a reduction in social and financial status and the threat of personal injury with little assistance from others. Her closest ally, her mother, 'did not know where [she] was and sent out [servants?] a little to seek [her]'[196]. Her mother was forced to provide lodgings and payment for the soldiers and was 'threatnd

[194] See chapter 2, pp. 48-50.
[195] Cobb and Jones pp.47-66.

cruelly' when she refused to produce Alice for Captain Innis. Dame Wandesford's own immediate supporter, Aunt Norton, was offered 'three or four thousand pounds...if she could procure [Alice]to be his wife'[197]. Their vulnerability to harassment and attack was very real and they were unprotected by the mechanisms of the state. Alice's mother's continuing problems led her to ask for help from a General lodging with Aunt Norton, but even this could not prevent threats from Captain Innis to ' burn her and [Alice] and all she had'[198]. With hindsight, Alice thanked God for her 'deliverance from this beast, from being destroyed and defloired by him'[199]; the recognition of the sexual nature of his intimidation added to the desperate situation in which the women found themselves. The only protection they could offer was to ensure that she was out of the house while the soldiers were there.

It would appear that Alice did not have a supportive network which could assist her in this situation. If the women's networks which appear at times of crisis are merely individuals who would assist anyone in a similar situation, then Alice Thornton would have been helped by a range of other people at this time. Women's networks were created and maintained by the women within them by friendship and reciprocity, but they were most visible at crisis points. One of the reasons that Alice

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[196] Thornton, Remembrances, p.44.
[197] Thornton, Remembrances, p. 44
[198] Thornton, Remembrances, p.45.
[199] Thornton, Remembrances, p.46.

was so vulnerable and isolated in 1643 was that she had only recently returned to England from Ireland. By 1662 however, she had been married and living in Yorkshire for a number of years and at the birth of her son Robert she related that she was attended by a number of female friends and relatives (see Figure 5):

> On Thursday my Lady Cholmely and my dere Aunt Norton, my lady Yorke and Mrs Wattson, with my sisters Denton and Frances Thornton, was with me and staied till evening, then went home to Oswaldkirke. The next day came againe.[200]

Although Alice did mention that her husband was in the house, he appeared to have played no part in the birth of her son and did not feature in the account until Robert's baptism.

Alice's mother had died in 1659, but Anne Norton remained a constant supporter. Anne Norton was Alice Thornton's godmother, the younger sister of Alice's father, who married Mauger Norton of Clowbeck near Richmond, Yorkshire. Mary Yorke was Anne and Mauger Norton's daughter, born in 1635 and therefore aged 27 years old in 1662. Daphne Lightfoot had also been a feature of Alice Thornton's life from an early age, first appearing in the account of her early life as Daphne Carrall before her marriage to George Lightfoot, Mr Thornton's manservant. She was described as a maid, but it is clear from her inclusion in every aspect of Alice's life that she relied on Daphne and that they were very close. Lady Catherine

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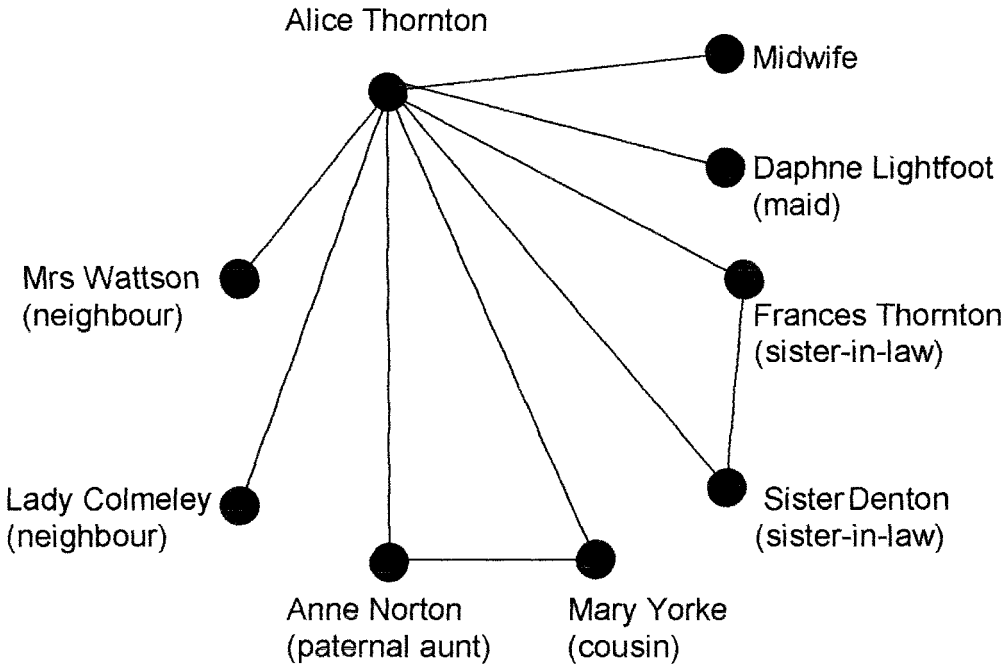
[200] Thornton, Remembrances, p. 141.

Cholmely lived at West Newton Grange and was a relatively close neighbour, as was Mrs Wattson. Sister Denton and Frances Thornton were Mr Thornton's sisters.

Figure 3 : Birth of son Robert 1662



This network consisted of a mixture of extended kin and neighbours, with only Daphne Lightfoot who was not a social equal. The ties were generally strong, with all members of the network connected to others as neighbours, friends or relatives[201]. The age range was quite wide. Alice herself was aged 36 years and the women covered at least two generations. The eldest woman would almost certainly have

[201] For discussion of the boundaries between family, kin and friends, see introduction pp. 11-15.

been Anne Norton who had been a near contemporary of Alice's mother. This network seems to have provided her with effective support at a difficult time:

> It pleased the great God to lay on me...a most violent and terrible flux of blood...spirits, soule, and strength seemed all gone from me. My lady Yorke out of her fright came to my bedside and wept over me...and by divine providence she gott the box and powder which I tould her of, and laid ready for myselfe before my sicknes, and tould my midwife and maid of...but they had forgotten it in their trouble for me.[202]

Although Alice attributed her survival to 'divine providence', the combined experience and expertise of her female supporters undoubtedly contributed to a successful parturition. She was able to draw women from her kinship and social networks to create a group who would provide her with practical and psychological support. This network was simply not in existence in 1643, even though Alice already knew some of its members.

The Structure of Informal Networks

As already discussed women's personal networks tended to consist of a mixture of family and friends. In contrast to formally organised, male-dominated networks, they crossed lines of age and social status and did not appear to have been hierarchical. Women's networks often had a wide range, including women of varying ages and

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[202] Thornton, Remembrances, p.141.

social status. This is partly due to the inclusion of family members across the generations. Alice Thornton's network, illustrated in Fig. 2 included her mother, paternal aunt, sister and sister-in-law.

Within families it could be argued that women's connections with each other owed more to the idea of family than to a separate female agenda. They could be perceived as supporting each other because they were part of the same family rather than because they belonged to a network of women. However, they can be seen as separate when their actions were aimed at furthering the interests of the women to the exclusion or detriment of the family as a whole. If they had been acting in the interest of her family, Lady Anne Clifford and her mother would have given in to the terms of her father's will as it followed patriarchal law. Their opposition created a gender division in the family and directly challenged the existing order. Although Lady Anne's network included herself and her mother and it was their familial relationship that defined them, they did not act to further the interests of their family. They wanted to preserve the right of the female descendants to retain control of lands and titles and were supported in this by women from outside of their own immediate family. At a time of particular difficulty Lady Anne Clifford was criticised by her kinsman:

> cousin Russell...told me of all my faults and errors in this business - he made me weep bitterly.... From hence I went to the Abbey at Westminster where I saw the Queen of Scots, her tomb[203].

[203] Clifford,p.250.

Lady Anne took comfort in visiting the remains of a woman who also suffered from disinheritance and was forced to stand against the power of the law and the state. From beyond the grave Lady Anne Clifford continued to feel the support of those women who had inspired her. After her mother's death, Lady Anne carried on her struggle so that she would be able to give her 'ancient inheritance'[204] to her daughter. When she eventually triumphed she attributed her success to 'the prayers of my blessed mother helping me therein'[205].

Chapter 6 will discuss how Aemilia Lanyer created a history of virtuous women in her poetry to support and encourage others. The use of historical and biblical female figures was common in many different media. Frye has analysed the use of needlework by women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which often included pictures of:

> Lucrece, Judith and Esther...visual expressions of narratives offering alternatives to the passivity, privacy, and silence that needlework was supposed to enforce[206].

As well as creating histories and networks of virtuous women from the past, women passed on the responsibility of continuing the tradition to those younger than

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[204] Clifford, p.246.
[205] Clifford, p.246.
[206] S. Frye, 'Sewing Connections: Elizabeth Tudor, Mary Stuart, Elizabeth Talbot, and Seventeenth-Century Anonymous Needleworkers' in Frye, Maids and Mistresses, p.165.

themselves. Female networks can be identified running through the generations. In her will, Alice Thornton left:

> To my dear daughter Comber three Books of my owne Meditations and Transactions of my life, and all the residue of my Papers and Books written with my owne hand, and my Recept(sic) Books[207].

Alice herself had possession of 'the little red truncke of my deare mother's'[208], in which she kept her mother's writings and that she then passed on to her own daughter. This would appear to be more than the mere transfer of possessions. The fact that each woman willed her writing to the daughter of the next generation created a tradition of literary self-expression. To make their writings the object of a formal bequest emphasised their importance and made explicit to the daughter the value that was given to female literary production. Alice Thornton passed on to her daughter more than ink and paper. Her actions demonstrated not only an awareness of the possibilities of writing for a woman at this time, but also the capacity of literature to create a heritage which could be transferred matrilinially. The value of the writings lay in the transmission of information from generation to generation, the maintenance of a tradition of women's writing and the continuance of a fierce pride in female ancestry.

The receipt book which Alice Thornton left to her daughter was extremely valuable in many ways. It would have contained recipes and remedies constituting

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[207] Thornton, Autobiography, p. 338.

the basis of a medical handbook at a time when serious illness was commonplace and trained medics rare, particularly in the isolated part of Yorkshire where the Thorntons lived. Although these texts have not survived, those of other similar gentlewomen have been preserved in the archives of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine. Elizabeth Jacob's book of *Physicall and chyrurgicall receipts, Cookery and preserves* contained the instructions on how to make a variety of household and medicinal products. It appears to have been started in 1654 by Elizabeth Jacob, but also contained additions in a number of different hands, including one dated 1685. The recipes themselves were also attributed to many other women, for example the instructions on how to make 'Syrrup of Gilly Flowers' was noted to be from 'Mdm Percival'[209] and 'To make Tafferty Tarts' to 'The Lady Hyde'[210]. The text has been annotated with comments as to the effectiveness or effect of the recipes. This can be considered as evidence of working research in medicine and family health which would have certainly contributed to the wellbeing of each generation as it was passed from woman to woman. Lady Anne Clifford also noted that her mother was 'a lover of the study and practice of alchimy, by which she found out excellent medicines, that did much good to many'[211]. By preserving the

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[208] Thornton, Autobiography, p. 146.
[209] Elizabeth Jacob, and others, Physicall and Chyrurgicall Receipts 1654-1685, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, WMS 3009, p. 296.
[210] Jacob, p. 200.
[211] Lady Anne Clifford, 'A summary of Records and also a memorial of that religious and blessed lady, Margaret Russell, Countess of Cumberland', quoted in Lewalsi, p.134. Lewalski also noted on p.373,

domestic expertise of herself and her mother, Alice Thornton willed to her daughters the means to assist in the survival of their families:

> I give unto my dear daughter Comber all my Phisicall(sic) books and Recepts, together with my stock of salves and oyntments, desiring her to give unto her sister Katherine Danby what she might have occasion to use for herself or her children.[212]

She assumed that her daughters would co-operate and share their knowledge and equipment. The continuation of the family was achieved by the care and expertise of the women who passed on their knowledge to the next female generation, in either written or oral forms[213].

As well as caring for physical wellbeing, many women seemed to seize on the responsibility for preserving the virtue and reputation of the female members of the family. Changes in the law throughout this period created the idea that property should be passed from man to man. The responsibility for virtue however, was appropriated by women and seen to be transferred via the female bloodline, in Lady

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n43, that on a shelf above the depiction of Margaret Russell in the Clifford Great Picture there is a copy of her own hand-written book of alchemical distillations and medicines.

[212]Thornton, Autobiography, p. 337.

[213] Women's Cookery and Receipt Books in manuscript form appear to differ markedly from printed versions produced in seventeenth century England. Georgia Wilder (University of Toronto) analysed the functions of printed cooking manuals in a paper presented at 'Virile Women, Consuming Men', University of Wales, Aberystwyth in April 2000. In 'Recipes for Monsters of the Realm: Cookery and Propaganda in the English Civil Wars' she argued that the printed manuals contained 'seemingly benign recipes [which] simultaneously provided political instructions to a larger 'domestic' sphere'. The printed books were mainly written or edited by men and provided an opportunity for covert propaganda.

Anne Clifford's case from her mother Margaret Russell[214]. The Clifford women were immortalised in Aemilia Lanyer's poetry where they were portrayed as examples of pity and integrity: 'In whose faire breast true virtue then was hous'd'[215]. Lady Anne Clifford was portrayed as the product of two noble families:

> that sweet Lady sprung from Clifford's race,
> Of noble Bedford's blood, faire steam of Grace[216].

The combination of these great families in female form resulted in 'true virtue'. Lady Anne Clifford's reaction to her long struggle for her inheritance was the commissioning of a series of three 'Great Books' which set out at length the genealogy of the family, plus an account of the legal proceedings in which she had been involved. It would appear that her intention was to provide evidence of their heritage and rights for her daughters. Women were generally valued in terms of their virtue and chastity as it directly affected their prospects and marriageability, therefore its preservation was of more importance to them than to the male members of the family.

Alice Thornton gave her daughter the means to defend the family reputation from denigration and slander. The books of meditations willed to her daughter consisted of a comprehensive defence of the Wandesford and Thornton families

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[214] J. Fitzmaurice, and J.A. Roberts, et al, editors, Major Women Writers of Seventeenth Century England, (London: University of Michigan Press, 1997) p.40. Margaret Russell was the daughter of Francis Russell, second Earl of Bedford.
[215] Lanyer, p. H4 See also discussion of Lanyer's 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum', Chapter 6, p.192.

written by Mrs Thornton to answer 'those slanders soe cruelly and inhumanely raised on me'[217]. Her intention in writing was that the papers would be: 'evidences...to be kept by my children for a justification of my innocency'[218]. Alice Thornton passed on to her daughter the responsibility for defending the virtue of the family name by entrusting her with the documents which could be used in its defence.

The Organisation of Informal Women's Networks

The networks described in this chapter functioned effectively because of the observance of strict unwritten rules and codes of conduct. Friendships and informal social relationships were usually based on reciprocity and honour. The unofficial nature of the regulations meant that they were difficult to identify in a network which was functioning smoothly. It was when the rules were broken that members of the networks reacted and therefore exposed the way in which they functioned.

In the 1660s, Alice Thornton gave hospitality and financial assistance to her friend and niece Mary Danby . The assistance was not merely material as Alice had : 'for twenty years space bin her continuall daily and faithfull friend'[219]. However, the relationship began to deteriorate when in 1668:

> her maide Barbara Tod did impudently accuse for my face my servant Hanna Ableson for telling severall storyes (W^{ch} were

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[216] Lanyer, p.H5
[217] Thornton, Autobiography, p.235.
[218] Thornton, Autobiography, p. 256.
[219] Thornton, Autobiography, p.224.

very great) lies & falsehoods against my selfe[220].

Alice Thornton made it clear in her writings that the help she had given her friend was bound by the strict rules of reciprocity, wherein she had:

> fed at my table, and clothed with my woole, and succoured in all distresse as witness this woman's many letters of thanks'[221].

It would appear that these goods and services were freely given by one woman to the other at a time of need. All that was needed to maintain the relationship was gratitude and loyalty. Alice had written evidence in the letters of gratitude from Mary Danby, which would have been enough to repay the debt if Mrs Danby's loyalty had continued. Allowing a servant to gossip and slander her host was proof to Alice that Mary Danby had not maintained the relationship to the required level. It was only when their relationship disintegrated that any account was made of the support given by one woman to the other, as it was obvious that the debt of honour accrued during their friendship would not be repaid. The rules of friendship had been broken causing bitterness, anger and recriminations between the two women.

Once the favours given by one woman to the other were seen to be unreciprocated, an account was made of their cost. Alice put a material price on the relationship of 'above £400 pounds...for her occasions and necessitys and her

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[220] Thornton, Remembrances, p.120.
[221] Thornton, Autobiography, p.223.

family'[222]. She perceived it as 'my charity in relieving those yt came under my Roofe & to whom I had done noe wrong'[223]. However, unlike true charity in which the giver would expect nothing in return, this arrangement required the recipient to at least return the favour in good will[224].

The dispute between the women had consequences for Alice Thornton which went beyond her relationship with Mary Danby. In her account of the incident leading to the rift, Alice was vague and defensive about its cause. It would appear that 'finding a daily decay, & great weaknesse of bodie & minde'[225], Alice had decided to settle her affairs and make provision for her children in the event of their parents' death. This included arranging the marriage of her daughter Alice to Thomas Comber, a clergyman who was living in their home at the time: 'it was Mr Combers desires to obteine my Daughter Alice in marriage'[226]. The interest of Mr Comber in young Alice Thornton, who was only fifteen at the time, coupled with his involvement in 'ye drawing of settlements & writings for Mr Thorntons Estate on my Children' appears to have raised suspicions of dishonest dealings. It would seem that as well as showing some financial inadequacies, Mrs Thornton had been accused of trying to marry off her daughter to disguise her own alleged affair with Thomas Comber:

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[222] Thornton, Autobiography, p.224. Many women at this time were negotiating for war pensions, they also placed a monetary value on relationships, see G.L Hudson, 'Negotiating for Blood Money: War Widows and the Courts in Seventeenth-Century England' in Kermode and Walker, editors, Women, Crime and the Courts, (London: UCL Press, 1994).
[223] Thornton, Remembrances, p, 121.
[224] See discussion on friendship theories, chapter 2, p.54-57.
[225] Thornton, Remembrances, p.123.

> those scandals, imputed by hell and his instruments, which said I was forced to marry my childe to hide my owne blame or dishonour'[227].

Thomas Comber's 'Memoirs' related the marriage as follows:

> To prevent my moving back into the South, Madam Thornton had given consent that I should have her daughter M^ts^ Alice; and as I had been a means to secure her fortune and her sister's during her Fathers life: so she finding *me likely to be more serviceable to the Family after his death...Resolved to* grant me my request...privately to marry my now dear wife[228].

Thomas Comber's account of the marriage would appear to tally with Alice Thornton's, and although he did not mention the trauma she suffered over her actions, he concluded that it 'was not made publick for some reasons till May 17th in the next year'[229]. Alice provided the motive for her condemnation as jealousy, because 'this woman...could not prevaile her designe upon ye person of Mr Comber to have drawne him for marriage'[230]. According to Mrs Thornton, Mary Breaks (Mary Danby's maid) had tried to arrange a marriage for Mr Comber herself and was therefore angry at his arrangement with the Thorntons. If this were simply the case, then it is unlikely that their dispute would have drawn in so many other people. Almost all of Alice's close friends and relations refused to co-operate in the

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[226] Thornton, Remembrances, p.123.
[227] Thornton, Autobiography, p.220.
[228] T. Comber, , 'The History of my Life: Collected Anno Domini 1695& -96', in Comber, The Autobiographies and Letters of Thomas Comber, sometime Precentor of York and Dean of Durham, edited by C. Whiting, volume I, (Durham: Andrews & Co for the Surtees Society, 1946) p.6.
[229] Comber, p.7.
[230] Thornton, Remembrances, p.123.

marriage, to the extent that young Alice's godmother tried to take her into safekeeping:

> she would come to pretend to have my daughter Alice with her to Yorke, under the pretence of having her to be confirmed, and so to have prevented the match to goe forward....for it
> was intended to steale her away, and all contrivances was laid out for it.[231]

It seems that they were concerned about young Alice's age and unwillingness to agree to the marriage. Although Alice insisted that her daughter was a willing participant, the fact that she 'with teares entred into it'[232] must create doubt as to her enthusiasm for the marriage. Alice Thornton's network completely disintegrated at this time and she was isolated by their disapproval. It would appear that they had to choose between their loyalty to Alice and their concern for her fifteen-year-old daughter's welfare.

Figure 6 shows the network identified by Alice Thornton when she was writing about those who would protect her from 'the most vild aspersions Mrs Danby had invented'. They were an informal group of women with strong connections and seem to form a dense network structure which should have supported Alice well in times of crisis. Some members, such as Anne Norton, Daphne Carroll and Lady Yorke had remained constant throughout Alice Thornton's life. One significant aspect of this network is the inclusion of Alice Thornton's eldest daughter. Without links to other members of the network, young Alice would have remained merely another member

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[231] *Thornton, Autobiography, p.227.*

of her mother's network. However, her links to other women provided an overlap and gave young Alice her own supporters. Many of the women were then faced with a conflict of interest when Alice Snr announced the intended marriage of her daughter to Thomas Comber.

Friends and family failed to prevent the wedding which went ahead in secret but their absence was an indication of the strength of their disapproval. It is also proof of the effectiveness of their organisation and communication. The fact that none of Alice Thornton's friends was willing to show their support by attending the wedding means that it was likely that they were in regular contact with each other and that the network could function without Mrs Thornton. Feelings against her proposed actions must have been very strong for her network to abandon her.

Although she rejected the formal processes of law, Alice Thornton retained a belief in the capacity of informal social justice to redeem her reputation. Fig.2 illustrates the limits of the formal legal system in the wider sense of social justice. It would seem that Alice Thornton rejected the closely defined world of the courts for an arena which would allow her greater self-expression.

The reluctance of Aunt Norton to visit until she had received a report on Mr Comber's character showed the extent to which Alice was ostracised. The account of the wedding indicated the severity of her isolation at that time and the strength of feeling against the marriage:

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[232] *Thornton*, Autobiography, p. 229.

> I myself being all the friend she had to stand for her father...she in a manner forlorne of all our relations, who should have been our comfort in this great trouble of our change.[233]

The wedding went ahead in secret 'by reason of our adversaryes malice', but their absence was an indication of the strength of their disapproval. It is also proof of the effectiveness of their organisation and communication. The friends and family failed to prevent the wedding, but their absence was an indication of the strength of their disapproval. It is also proof of the effectiveness of their organisation and communication.

The fact that none of Alice Thornton's friends was willing to show their support by attending the wedding means that they must have been in contact with each other. Although the marriage was sanctioned by state, religion and family, the withholding of approval by Mrs Thornton's informal network created a great deal of disruption.

Alice Thornton's writing represented an attempt to be included once again in a support network which had abandoned her, she felt unjustly. This network was so important to her that she felt it necessary to produce a defence in writing. Whilst Margaret Cavendish wrote to prevent herself being forgotten or mistaken for her husband's first (or subsequent) wife[234], and Aphra Behn wrote to earn a living, Alice

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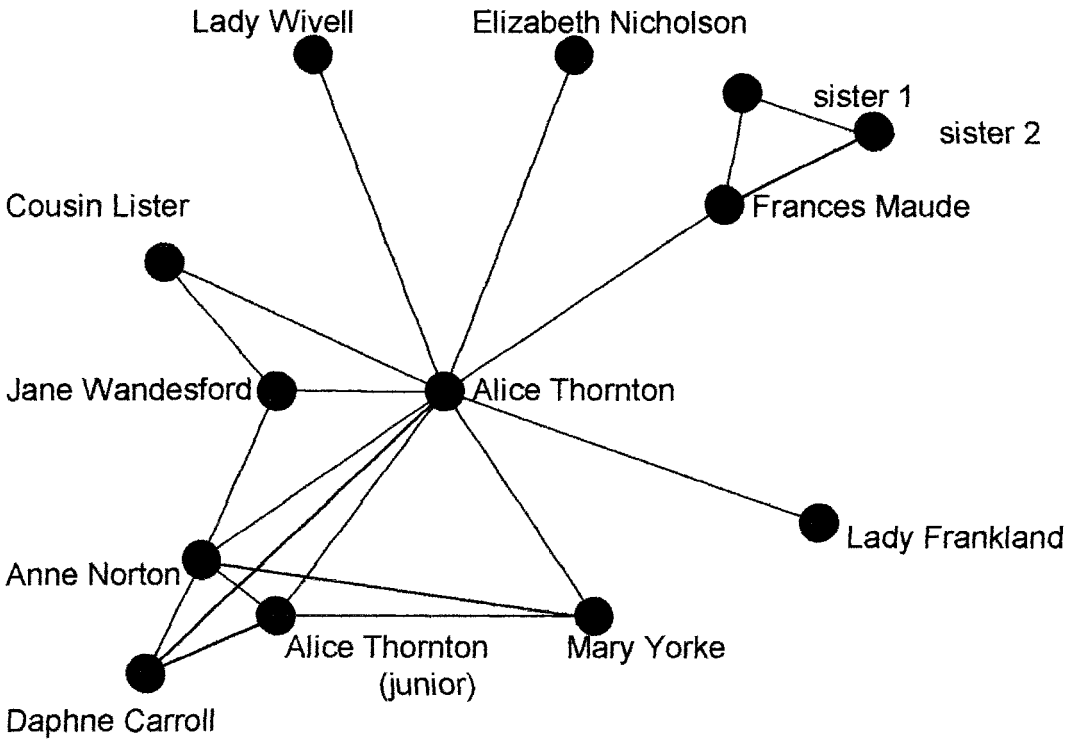
[233] *Thornton*, Autobiography, p.231.
[234] Margaret Cavendish, The Life of William Cavendishe (1667). Wing N849.

Thornton intended to elicit an immediate response from her audience. She wrote to defend herself from 'those slanders soe cruelly and

Figure 4: Alice Thornton's network at the time of the 'incident', 1668.



inhumanely raised on [her]'[235], intending her account to be read by her friends, thereby rescuing her previously damaged reputation. She attempted to answer her critics and justify her actions so that she could regain her place within her society.

Although the text was not designed to be publicly printed, it was written with the express purpose of circulation amongst a wide group, so that it 'might be able to satisfy all my friends of my life and conversation,- that it was not such as my deadly enymyes suggested'[236].

Alice Thornton's answer to criticism was aimed at restoring her reputation within her own milieu, rather than in the community at large where her status as a gentlewoman could assure respect to a major degree. The seriousness of the allegations cannot be underestimated, however, as she described them as 'murder committed on my good name and innocency'[237]. She could have pursued a case for defamation through the courts, as many women did at this time[238]. This course of action tended to be taken more frequently by women of lower social status however, and it would appear that Mrs Thornton had little to gain from discussion of her problems in a court of law. Her access to her contemporaries was limited due to her rural base so she retaliated with a written defence of her actions. It would seem that it was partly the physical isolation which prompted Alice to write her defence, rather than relying on word of mouth. It could also be the case that she did not wish to lower herself to the actions of her detractor who, 'spread her lies abroad at

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[235] Thornton, Autobiography, p.235.
[236] Thornton, Autobiography, p.259.
[237] Thornton, Autobiography, p.257.
[238] Gowing, pp. 26-47.

Richmond'[239] She clearly believed that the written word carried authority, even though this authority was reduced by the fact that she was a female author.

Her confidence in the power of the written word was confirmed throughout the account[240]. Following the death of her husband, Alice related a list of the 'consolatory advices, and affectionate letters written to comfort me in my sorrowes and loss of my deare husband, as well as under that other calamity'[241]. The letters were numbered and described in turn, giving the impression of calm, logical progression. Alice concluded the list with a statement which appeared to mimic legal language:

> These letters, papers and transaction of this affaire are in bundles, and preserved, to make out these proceedings, and in vindication of our just and lawdable actions.(p.256)

The misspelling of laudable added to the impression that she was defending that which was *lawful* and the collection of papers were in fact 'evidences...to be kept by my children for a justification of my innocency'[242]- to be used prove her case.

Mandel has suggested that when life does not live up to expectations autobiographical writings could be a way of making the author's life matter[243]. Alice Thornton's text provided illusions which gave importance to the past and endowed

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[239] Thornton, Remembrances, p.121.
[240] *For consideration of the importance and effectiveness of manuscript networks see* A., Shephard, editor Communities *in* Early Modern England, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
[241] *Thornton, Autobiography, p.253.*
[242] Thornton, Autobiography, p.257.

the author's life with significance, preserving it in an enduring artefact. Thus, Alice gave commonplace incidents and ailments the status of life-changing events, re-creating her life as one littered with evidence of God's intentions for her. She was saved from drowning, fire, shipwreck and numerous deadly illnesses and all were related in the most unequivocal terms:

> Oh! What shall I render to the great God of heaven who has delivered me from perishing by the water...All glory be to my gracious God of heaven by all the powers of men and angels for ever. Oh let me live to Thy glory and serve Thy Majesty for ever! Amen.[244]

Her survival was paraded as evidence of God's favour and this further gave authority to her words. The fate of the woman who insulted her was added as proof of Alice's chosen status. She threatened that:

> God will revenge thy cause uppon all those miscreants who has abused and injured thy precious good name

and later related that:

> this mother, who had in so vile a manner abused myself and childe and Mr Comber, fell very sick of a strong fever...cryed out... 'that she was damned for what she had done to wrong myself and Mr Comber'.[245]

The idea of divine justice, whereby when a person had committed an offence they would be punished by God was widely accepted. The downfall of Alice Thornton's

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[243] J.Mandel Barratt, 'Full of Life Now', in J. Olney, editor, Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).p.64.
[244] Thornton, Autobiography, p.49.

detractor was paraded as further evidence that she had been unjustly slandered and that God was on her side.

It could be suggested that the reasons Alice gave to justify her writing were merely an attempt to distract the reader's attention from the writing of her own life. Male autobiography is said to derive its authority from the assumption by both the author and reader that the life of the subject is an exemplary one[246]. Alice Thornton's writing did not originate from the same position as she had to convince the reader of her unblemished character as well as justify the fact of female authorship. Lady Anne Clifford's writing can be seen to originate from similar motivation, as she wanted to preserve an account of her struggles and eventual success against all odds, for posterity. Both writers had to create authority within the text therefore, to give weight to their argument. Alice felt strongly enough about her rejection by her support network to draft a defence of herself against the allegations which threatened her position. The sense of injustice and righteousness was passionately portrayed in the language and imagery of the chapters dealing with the 'incident'. By making her life pattern one of being saved by God, Alice endowed her writing with unquestionable authority and deflected criticism - to dispute her case, critics would also be forced to denounce God's will. The conversion of the reader which Alice Thornton attempted was at times over-zealous, but there can be no doubt that her

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[245] Thornton, Autobiography, p.223.

intentions were inspired by the need to provide a history of her life and family which was powerful enough to counteract that of her enemies and allow her re-inclusion in a network providing essential practical, emotional and spiritual support.

It is clear that women in early modern England created and maintained personal networks of great value to themselves and their immediate societies. The structure and organisation of these networks, although shadowy at times, can be identified by analysis of women's autobiographical writings. They were not exclusive, but worked alongside other structures, becoming more visible when challenged or disrupted. The importance of women's networks to their members cannot be understated. In situations where women were legally and culturally discriminated against they relied on their networks to prevent social marginalisation. They were also able to exert pressure and influence on the members of their networks to attempt to modify actions or change behaviour. The day to day life of women in the seventeenth century was rendered infinitely more difficult and dangerous without the intervention and support of their personal networks.

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[246]B. Brodski and C. Schenck, Life Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography, (London: Cornell University Press, 1988). p.5.

Chapter 4
On the Margins of the Formal System -The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The networks of Alice Thornton and Lady Anne Clifford were always informal in structure. They did not have any stated objectives and worked by utilising unwritten codes of conduct. During the seventeenth century a number of women's networks were founded that attempted to operate within the formal system. This chapter will consider the reasons why this started to become more common at this time, it will also consider the benefits, difficulties and overall implications of joining the formal system for the women involved in the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM).

The IBVM was formed around 1609 by Mary Ward, a Roman Catholic woman from North Yorkshire. From her early teens she had intended becoming a member of a religious order and had spent time in a number of religious institutions in France, including the Poor Clares and the Order of St Theresa. However, in 1609 she had three visions which she interpreted as instruction to form a new apostolic order of religious women. The first outline of the organisation, the *Schola Beatae Mariae* was developed by the founder members and dated at around 1611. A longer and more detailed exposition called the *Ratio Instituti* was completed in 1616.

Within this thesis the place of the IBVM can be seen from two differing perspectives. In seventeenth-century England, they were always forced to operate

as an informal women's network because of legal status of the Roman Catholic Church. Within the church they struggled for acceptance and although formally organised they were often marginalised and legitimised or prohibited depending on the definition of the church structures of the time.

The IBVM was formed within the Roman Catholic church and attempted to function as part of the official organisation. In previous centuries women's religious groups had been able to flourish within the church's structure as its regulations were relatively flexible. By the seventeenth century however, the Protestant Reformation had caused the Roman Catholic church to re-examine its activities. Between 1545-63 the Council of Trent laid down in unambiguous language what was and was not to be allowed to happen within the church. In an effort to dispel accusations of immorality and laxity which had previously been levied at uncloistered convents, women's role was strictly prescribed:

> The Council sought to remedy the abuses that had sprung up in convents by sealing them off from the outside world[247].

Norberg has suggested that there was also pressure from the secular community to restrict women's orders to claustration as there was a requirement that nuns should be legally "dead" and therefore unable to make a claim on the family property:

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[247] K. Norberg, 'The Counter Reformation and Women: Religious and Lay', in J. O'Malley, editor, Catholicism in Early Modern History: a Guide to Research, (St Louis, Mo: Center for Reformation Research, 1988) p.134.

> the Church was responding in part to the needs of secular society and to the demands of elite families eager to maintain their patrimony[248].

The Council of Trent closely defined the female role within the Catholic church, reducing the role of female religious and all but banning more than essential contact with ordinary people.

Once close definition was established, the flexibility which had allowed the establishment of active religious women was decreased. Women who wanted to follow an active, rather than contemplative religious life no longer fitted into the formal part of the system. Before the Reformation, when the lines between official and unofficial roles and duties for women were blurred, or deliberately ill-defined, fewer of their activities were placed in informal social structures as they could function adequately within the parameters of the official systems. If official structures had been less closely defined the IBVM would have been able to exist on the boundaries of the formal church. Once the formal organisation became more closely determined by law, and it was clearly stated that women could only follow a contemplative life, their activities were pushed outwards into the informal system.

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[248] Norberg, p.135.

Women's Place in English Roman Catholic Society

It is a common assumption that marriage and family was the first choice of lifestyle for all women in the early modern period. The reasons given for alternative choices such as religion were usually that a suitor could not be found or that the family could not afford a dowry for all of its daughters[249] (This ignores the fact that a dowry was required before a woman would be accepted into a convent). Convents were seen as 'convenient stowage for... withered daughters' by Milton and many others[250]. The idea that a young woman would, of her own free will, take a positive step towards a life of religion and chastity is rarely considered.

Norberg has highlighted the prevailing view of historians that within Catholicism the role of women 'as wives and mothers [was] depreciated by a church that still preferred celibacy to the family'[251] .It would appear, however, that young Catholic women of late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century England were more likely to be pressurised into marriage rather than being encouraged to enter one of the religious orders of the time.

Mary Ward suffered years of opposition to her desire to dedicate her life to God.[252] From the age of thirteen various suitors were suggested to her, all of whom

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[249] Hufton, p. 253.
[250] John Milton, 'Animadversions', July 1641, quoted in Hill, 'A Refuge from Men: The Idea of a Protestant Nunnery', Past and Present, Volume 117, 1987, p.109.
[251] Norberg, p. 133.
[252] For discussion of the role of family, kin and community in the making of marriage see, D. O'Hara, Courtship and Constraint: Re-thinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

she rejected. Her parents assumed that she objected to the young man, rather than the idea of marriage itself, as in one instance where:

> her deer & noble harted(sic) Father broke it off, esteeming it an aversion she had grown from that particular Person, & that it would not be hard, to find her choyce.[253]

In her autobiographical writings, Mary Ward related the opposition she faced when she made it clear that she wanted to become a nun. Her father forbade her to leave the country and she did not outwardly resist his command, as she 'loved him extremely and had not the heart to say anything to him which would grieve him'[254]. Mary recognised her responsibility to her father, but she placed her relationship with God before her filial obligations as she 'resolved... to set out immediately and never see him again'[255]. Her confessor, who may have been expected to support her desire to follow a religious life, 'was also of the opinion that in no way ought [she] to leave England nor make [herself] a religious'[256]. His advice was unequivocal:

> were she a Novice in any Religion she would doe(sic) God more service to come out and marry this party, than to proceed: particularly he resolving never to marry if she would never have him.[257]

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[253] Winifred Wigmore and Mary Poyntz, 'A Breife Relation of the holy life & happy death of our Dearest Mother of blessed memory, Mrs Mary Ward'. Manuscript copy dated 1716 is held at the Bar Convent, York. This biography of Mary Ward was written just after her death in1645. It was initially attributed to Winifred Wigmore, but it is now accepted that it was a collaborative project between Winifred Wigmore and Mary Poyntz, two of Mary Ward's closest colleagues, p. 5b.
[254] Ward, Mary, 'Autobiography', quoted in M. E. Orchard, IBVM, Till God Will: Mary Ward Through her Writings, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985) p. 12.
[255] Orchard, p. 12.
[256] Orchard, p. 12

The movement from the ideal of the contemplative religious life to the ideal of the family is seen as one of the greatest differences in religious culture from Catholicism to the reformed church[258]. The difficulties experienced by Mary Ward in attaining her aim of a religious calling would therefore appear unusual:

> Of all my relations and friends, both secular and spiritual, there was not one... who did not more or less dissuade me from taking up that state of life[259].

However, Mary Poyntz also experienced similar objections to her religious aspirations. She was betrothed to a "suitable" young man, but she told him of her calling to a religious life. He was not discouraged and requested a portrait of her. Plate 1 shows the completed picture which was painted to her own instructions. It presented half of her face as a likeness. The other half however:

> was painted like a death's head, a skull, and from the cheek down to the chest the flesh was quite corrupted and eaten by worms'[260] (see Plate 1).

Marriage was regarded by her as a physical rather than spiritual existence and one which would lead to the corruption of the inner self.

The painting that Mary Poyntz commissioned showed the strength of her feelings against the proposed marriage. She would appear to have been rejecting her earthly body by emphasising the transient nature of human existence. While she

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[257] Wigmore and Poyntz, r.8.
[258] Crawford, pp. 39-41.
[259] Orchard, p. 12.

appeared beautiful, she was already rotting. The importance of the soul was perceived as overriding all concern with the body and this also condemned the temptations of the flesh.

It would seem that there was a discrepancy between the idea of the celibate religious life as a perfect life choice for Catholics and the reality of intense pressure on young people to marry. The suitors in both of the above examples went on to become clerics themselves. Mary Ward's intended husband 'became a Religious Man & a Priest, & from him the Title went to Heretickes(sic), so as by his absence the Catholickes(sic) lost a great support'[261]. It is possibly this statement which holds the key to a change in attitudes to Catholic marriage in England at this time. The English Catholic community was under threat and it would seem that to preserve their place in society it was imperative that the population numbers were maintained and that Catholic lands and money were kept within their own families.

The loss of young women from their elite families into chaste, female, religious groups meant that they were unable to reproduce and maintain the Catholic population in England. It is important not to underestimate the fear of Catholics at this time, that their religion and way of life would be forever wiped out in England by state endorsed persecution. The emphasis on keeping marriages within members of

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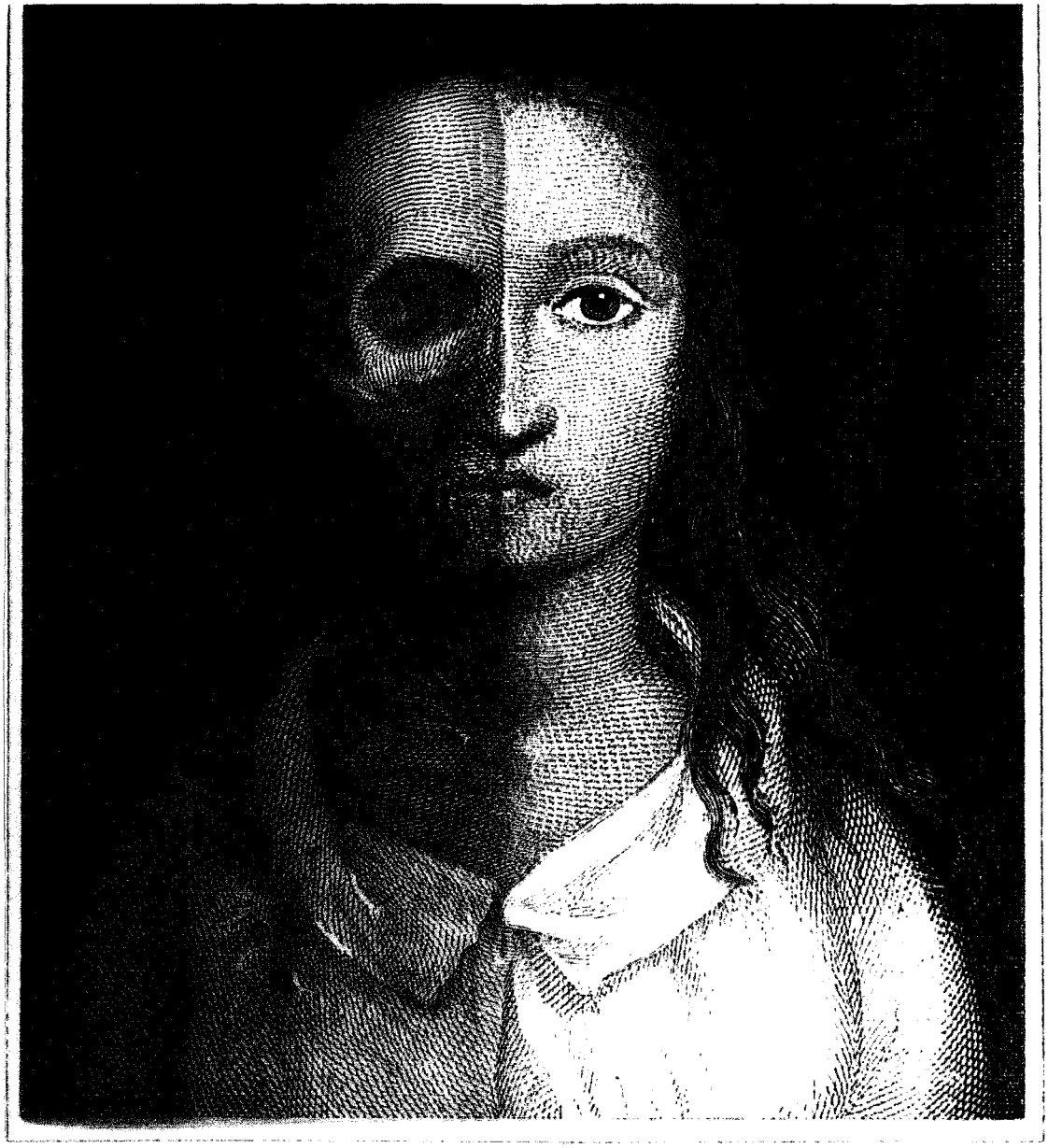
[260] *Biographical notes of Mary Cramlington, early eighteenth century, quoted in* M.C.E. Chambers, The Life of Mary Ward Volume II, p.240.
[261] *Wigmore and Poyntz, r 8.*

the same religious group for similar reasons was repeated later in the century by the Society of Friends, as will be discussed in chapter 5.

Plate 1: 'Vera Effigies' - Portrait of Mary Poyntz
(etching of original in Chambers, Life of Mary Ward)



Women's pivotal role in ensuring the survival of Catholicism in England and Northern England in particular, has been documented and recognised from the sixteenth century onwards. Court records documented the steps taken to attempt to ensure the conformity of women 'in respect that by their example whole families refuse to resort to Church and continue in recusance'[262]. The lack of a Catholic Bishop in England between 1559 and 1623 meant that religious life was organised around the home and the absence of church structures meant that a sense of individual responsibility was very strong. With the focus of religious activity in the home, many women took a key role in the maintenance of their religion, with activities ranging from harbouring priests and Jesuits, to teaching and catechising the young to ensure the continuation of the Catholic faith[263]. The women of the IBVM came from this environment, where women took the lead in religious life and their value was generally unstated, but incontestable nonetheless. What the IBVM attempted to do was to transform the informal activities of recusant women into a formal organisation which made religion their prime concern.

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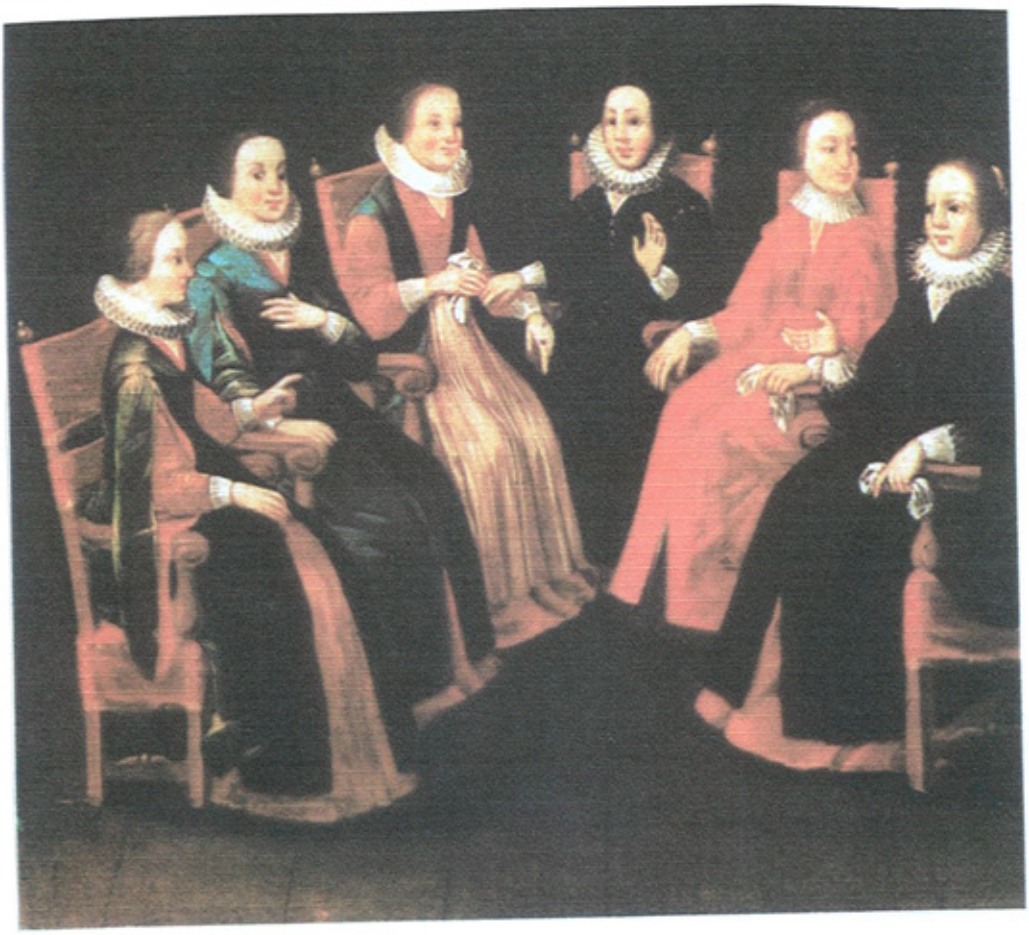
[262] *Chief Justice Popham of London (1593), quoted in* M. B. Rowlands, 'Recusant Women 1560-1640', in M. Prior, editor, Women in English Society 1500-1800, (London: Methuen, 1985) p.153.
[263] For further consideration of the role of women in perpetuating Catholicism in England see M.B. Rowlands, English Catholics of Parish and Town 1558-1778, (Catholic Record Society, 1999) and S.L. Barstow, "Worth nothing, but very wilful': Catholic Recusant Women of Yorkshire 1536-1642' in Recusant History Volume 25 (4) 2001.

Who were the members of the IBVM?

The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary began with a small group of women in 1609. A picture from the 'Painted Life' series (see Plate 2) depicted a group of six young women, seated in a semi-circle and talking in an animated way. They were similarly dressed in clothing appropriate for gentlewomen of the period and posed to indicate no obvious "leader". The lack of any uniform or habit prevents the viewer from seeing the women as nuns. Their differing facial expressions suggest that they were intellectually active and intent on their discussion. The idea of movement in their hands is very pronounced and Mary Ward (third from right) is portrayed with her left hand raised and palm facing towards the rest of the group. This hand position can be interpreted as an apostle or prophet granting protection to their devotees and dispelling fear[264]. However, the raised hand would normally be the right and the position of the other women's hands do not appear to have any significance, so to read such meaning into the hand positions of this example would be misleading.

Plate 2: "Painted Life"
(Bar Convent)



The inscription on the picture reads:

> Mary, while in London in the year 1609, by her edifying life and fervent words, won for the Heavenly Bridegroom several young maidens of high degree, who, to escape from the snares of the world, went with her to St Audomaro[265].

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[264] J. Hall, Illustrated Dictionary of Symbols in Eastern and Western Art, (London: John Murray, 1994) pp.131-132.
[265] "Painted Life", Original in IBVM, Augsburg, copy at Bar Convent, York.

Although Poyntz and Wigmore's 'Briefe Relation' mentions only that 'diverse Gentlewomen'[266] accompanied Mary Ward to St Omer, further information can be gathered from other sources. Barbara Ward wrote that:

> They were of good means and worth, some of whose friends had suffered much persecution and imprisonment for the catholic faith[267].

Mary Cramlington's biographical notes (made in the early eighteenth century from discussions with early IBVM members) identified the women as Mary Ward, Mary Poyntz, Winefrid Wigmore, Joanna Brown, Susanna Rookwood and Catharine Smith[268]. After the six women arrived in St Omer to begin their work, they were quickly joined by Barbara Ward (Mary's sister) and Barbara Babthorpe.

Although their meeting and gathering together has been mythologised and romanticised to a great extent by her biographers, it would seem that in 1609, Mary Ward returned to England with the intention of forming a religious group of women which could function in a way that was similar to the Society of Jesus. She visited various friends and relations among the recusant population of England, gathering together interested women and setting up a base in London. The danger of discovery was very real and after a number of escapes, and re-locations, they left England for France.

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[266] Poyntz and Wigmore, A Briefe Relation, r15.
[267] Barbara Ward, 'A Copy of Barbara Ward, her Holy purposes', Nymphenburg Manuscripts, quoted in Chambers, p. 263.
[268] Mary Cramlington, manuscript notes, Nymphenburg archives, quoted in Chambers, p. 236.

Most of the women were in some way related or connected to the Ward family: Winefrid Wigmore and Mary Ward met briefly in 1606 when they were staying at the home of mutual friends, Susanna Rookwood was a distant relation, as was Joanna Browne. Mary Poyntz was also a distant relative of Mary Ward, although they did not meet until 1605. Little is known about Catherine Smith, but Philip suggests that she also came from a family related to the Wards[269].

Whether they were linked by blood or not, the Catholic families of England were all closely connected at this time and formed a cohesive and protective, if secretive, group, against the persecution of the state. It is likely that the links between the families of these women were further strengthened in 1606-1609, as they were affected by the ramifications of the Gunpowder Plot. After the conspiracy was foiled, the families and friends of the Gunpowder Plotters were assembled in Warwickshire under the pretext of a marriage, where they were then taken into custody[270]. Three of Mary and Barbara Ward's uncles were suspected of being involved in the conspiracy: Thomas Percy, John and Christopher Wright were killed by sheriff's officers at Holbeach. Susanna Rookwood's brother, Ambrose, was executed for his part in the conspiracy.

So, the members of this organisation were all Catholic women of high social status who met through their family and religious connections. Their group was

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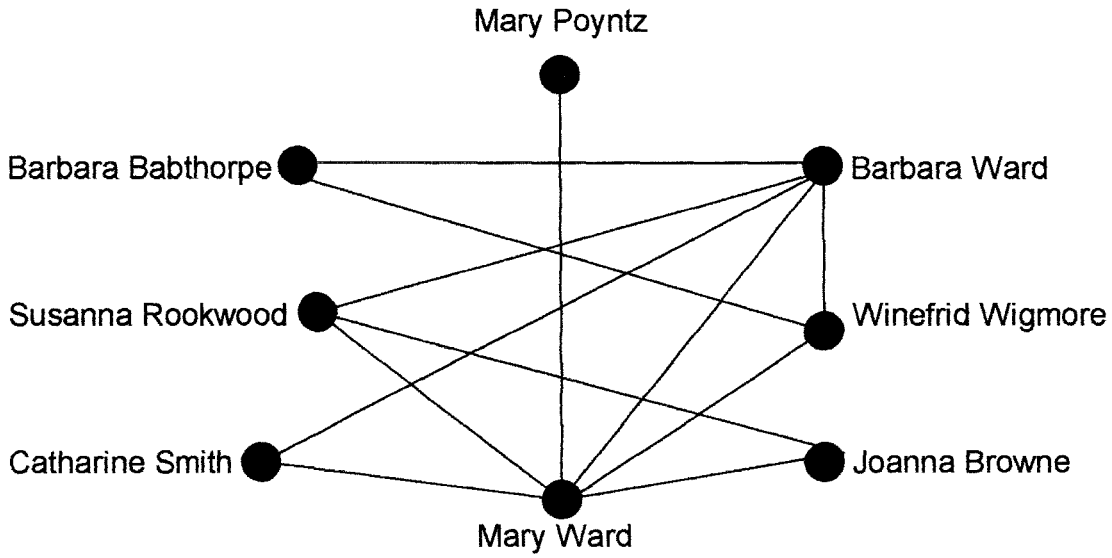
[269] Philip, Companions of Mary Ward, p.70.
[270] Chambers, p. 88-89.

identified as exclusively female in their own writings and visual biography. Some of the women were blood relatives, but only Barbara Babthorpe, Mary Ward and Winifred Wigmore had a personal relationship before this time. It would appear that they all had a similar upbringing, with a relatively comprehensive education for the time.

Figure 5: The ties between the founder members of the IBVM



Their ages varied from Mary Poyntz, who was just sixteen when she joined the others, to Joanne Browne who was apparently aged twenty-eight or twenty-nine at

that time[271]. The women also shared experiences which drew them together and away from mainstream society - they belonged to a persecuted religious minority. All of the women had relatives who had suffered for the Catholic faith, they had endured separations from close family and lived within a tradition of martyrdom. Although there were clear connections between the women, there is no indication that they were already operating as an informal network. They gathered together with a common purpose, to dedicate their lives to God and to work for the Catholic Church.

As the institute expanded into Europe and became firmly established in some areas, new members were attracted to it. They came from other English Catholic families, as well as from the local communities. However, the management of the Institute remained in the hands of a small closely knit group.

At Mary Ward's deathbed in 1645, the women of the IBVM gathered around her. This network appears remarkably similar to that of 1609, considering the thirty-six years which had passed. A letter from Mary Poyntz to Barbara Babthorpe detailed the last hours of Mary Ward's life and gave an account of those who were with her[272]. From the original group, Susanna Rookwood, Barbara Ward and Joanna Brown had died some years earlier, but Winefrid Wigmore, Catherine Smith and

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[271] Chambers, p. 248.
[272] *Letter from Mary Poyntz to Barbara Babthorpe in Rome, printed in Chambers, pp. 497-500.*

Mary Poyntz were all present. Added to this core group were Elizabeth Cotton, Elizabeth Keyes, Frances Bedingfield and Anne Turner[273].

The density of this network is clearly visible. All of the women were members of the IBVM and had held positions within the organisation on the continent prior to their return to England. Their emotional ties were very strong. Anne Turner had acted as Mary Ward's nurse for some years due to her failing health, Elizabeth Cotton had performed secretarial work and along with Elizabeth Keyes, they had been members of the institute since at least 1623[274]. Frances Bedingfield went on to found the Bar Convent at York. The fact that the original members of the IBVM remained part of the organisation in such a close way would indicate that it worked very effectively in supporting its members.

The "replacement" of the three founder members who had died with a similar number of women would appear to indicate that this group was a convenient size to effectively support its members. Seven or eight would seem to be a manageable number for a network to ensure that the amount of work required from each member to maintain the network was within practical limits[275]. There is little indication that any outside agencies were involved in helping the women in any particular way, so they relied on each other for physical and emotional support. Their solidarity and survival

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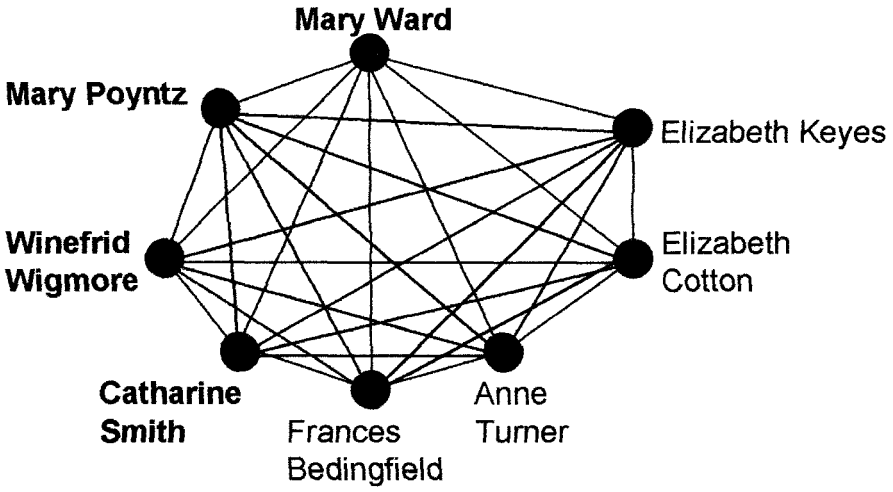
[273] *For information about the women of the IBVM in Yorkshire in the years immediately following* Mary Ward's death see Sr. Gregory Kirkus IBVM, 'The Presence of the Mary Ward Institute in Yorkshire, 1642-1648', Recusant History *Volume 25* (3).

[274] H. Peters, Mary Ward: A World in Contemplation, (Leowing: Gracewing, 1994) p.335.

as a unit must have been strongly influenced by the need to bolster each other against a common enemy. Although it was in their own interests to present a united front to prevent attack by their enemies, the lack of discord within the movement would indicate real commitment to common aims and beliefs.

Figure 6: Mary Ward's deathbed (1645)

(The founder members of the IBVM are in bold)



[275] For analysis of optimum network size/density see Chapter 2, p.50-54.

The Aims of the IBVM

The IBVM had two basic aims:

> to work constantly at the perfection of our own souls under the Standard of the Cross, both by the acquirement of all virtues, by abegnation of all self-will and by diligent extirpation of self-love.
>
> To devote ourselves with all diligent and prudent zeal to promote or procure the salvation of our neighbour, by means of the education of girls, or by any other means that are congruous to the times[276]

The first aim fitted easily into the idea of the contemplative religious woman, dedicating herself to God and to the perfection of her spirit. It was the second issue which was the cause of a great deal of conflict within the English Catholic church. The IBVM were influenced by the example of the Society of Jesus who were proactive in their approach to Catholicism, seeking to convert people to their religion. However, the idea of an apostolic role for women came from the example of early deaconesses of the Primitive Church, such as Mary and Martha in the New Testament[277]. It was essential to the women's vision and to the real and pressing need to protect and foster Catholicism in England.

Like many women at this time, including those in the Society of Friends and other radical Protestant sects, the women of the IBVM recognised the value of education in inculcating their beliefs into the next generation. They realised that the only way to ensure the survival of Catholicism in England under the reign of the Protestant Stuart monarchs,

was encourage new generations to follow the Roman Catholic faith: 'to devote ourselves...to promote or procure the salvation of our neighbour, by means of the education of girls'[278]. The concentration of their efforts on girls had a double effect for, by converting the female population who had such influence on their own children, they also had a good chance of the next generation being brought up in the Catholic faith.

This was not a new strategy, but one which had been used by Catholic women since the Reformation in England. In the 1570s and 1580s, Margaret Clitherow and Dorothy Vavasour ran a maternity home near York for Catholic women[279]. Their aim was to ensure the baptism of newborn children and to offer the mothers support in bringing up their offspring as Roman Catholics. The traditionally female activity of childbirth and child-care was used to protect and promote Catholicism, encouraging their religion in the face of the intense prosecution which led to the death of both women at the hands of the state in 1586-1587. The women who founded the IBVM were well aware of their predecessors. The story of Margaret Clitherow's martyrdom was part of Mary Ward's childhood education and inspiration:

> I liked to keep company with those in the house that I thought most virtuous; amongst whom there was especially one, a maid of great virtue and advanced years, who looked after the chapel... by some speeches of hers, I found

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[276] Ratio Institutii, Chambers p. 378.
[277] Latz, Glow-Worm Light, p.167.
[278] Latz, p. 377.
[279] W. Fee, 'The Heroines of Persecution Days', Journal of the North-East Catholic History Society, no. 28 Autumn 1988, p.3. See also S.L. Barstow, "Worth nothing, but very wilful": Catholic Recusant Women of Yorks. 1536-1642'.

> myself moved to love a religious life.... Oh how important is good example and holy conversation[280].

Although she was formally schooled by priests, Mary seems to have drawn support and encouragement from the example of female Catholic martyrs and saints:

> which so inflamed her well prepared Hart(sic), as nothing could satisfy her, but a Living or dying Martyrdom[281].

The "Painted Life" illustrates this aspect of her education as an important part of Mary Ward's childhood, emphasising this oral culture rather than learning from books. In this one of the paintings, a group of women of differing status were depicted working together in a domestic setting. Catholic beliefs were perpetuated by the passing on of knowledge through exactly this type of female network and seemed to give the women a sense of responsibility to maintain their religion.

If the IBVM were restricted to taking into their order only girls who intended to become religious themselves, and therefore remain childless, the missionary aspect of their work would have been lost. Their professed aim was therefore to educate girls so that they might, 'according to their respective vocations, profitably embrace either the secular or the religious state'[282]. It was essential that the members of the IBVM remained free to go out into the world and associate with lay people:

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[280] M. E. Orchard, IBVM, Till God Will: Mary Ward Through her Writings, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985) p.11.
[281] Wigmore, and Poyntz, A Breife Relation, r14.
[282] Chambers, p. 376.

> In order to attain our end, it is moreover necessary...that this our least and unworthy Congregation should be allowed, with the approbation and permission of the Apostolic See, to begin and exercise its duties without inclosure[283]

This emphasis on uncloistered activity was repeated a number of times in the *Ratio Instituti.* Their activities were seen as work which 'cannot be undertaken in convents', 'necessary for various and important causes', 'otherwise our Institute and method of life can neither be observed nor practised'.

The fact that the women of the IBVM insisted on entering the public arena presented a challenge to the male-dominated church hierarchy. Rosaldo offers two alternatives to women wishing to be effective in the male world: either take on male roles, or create a 'sense of rank order and value in a world in which women prevail'[284]. The IBVM based their activities on both of these fronts. They attempted to do apostolic work similar to that of the Jesuits, but also created a public world of their own by setting up a microcosm of their ideal female society within the Houses of the Institute.

The Organisation of the Institute

Women's personal networks tended to consist of a mixture of family and friends. In contrast to formally organised, male- dominated networks, they crossed lines of age

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[283] Chambers, p. 377.
[284] Rosaldo, p. 36.

and social status and did not appear to have been hierarchical. Women's networks often had a wide range, including women of varying ages and social status. This is partly due to the inclusion of family members across the generations. Alice Thornton's network, illustrated in Fig. 5 included her mother, paternal aunt, sister and sister-in-law.

Unlike Quaker women later in the seventeenth century, the originators of the IBVM did not have an existing informal network in place. There were links between a few of them, but the group came together with the primary aim of founding the IBVM. In St Omer, the women 'bought a house which [they] furnished, & ordered in a manner so as to live in a regular observance'[285]. As a religious institute, it was formally organised almost immediately, the parameters laid out in their first document submitted to the Pope in 1616.

Internally, the IBVM was governed by an appointed leader who answered to the Pope. The place of the IBVM in the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic church was unusual because it was intended that it would not come under local episcopal authority like most other religious orders. Gallagher suggests that this could be reasonably explained by the fact that there was not a viable alternative for English Catholics due to the lack of ministry in England at that time[286]. However, it would appear more likely that the women of the IBVM wished to avoid being drawn into

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[285] Poyntz and Wigmore, r. 15.

local religious politics, or being at the mercy of priests who may not have supported their work. The approval of the Pope would have silenced criticism and provided unquestionable authority for the institute.

The young women who left England in 1609 had a clear idea of the sort of organisational structure they wished to create, that which would best serve their aims. Mary Ward had already been a lay sister of the Poor Clares in St Omer; she knew what a life of enclosure could offer and rejected it totally. The first outline of the organisation of the IBVM defined it as different to most other religious groups for women operational at that time. The main differences were non-enclosure; the division into four grades instead of three; the power to dismiss any that were unruly; a Head of the whole organisation, the Chief Superior; and, subjection to the Pope alone therefore bypassing the Diocese. The dress that the women adopted was not a habit or uniform, but consisted of 'cloaths comfortable, very grave and retyred, but not of the Monasticall'[287]. They were also allowed to carry money. Although this was criticised by some, the way in which the women dressed and acted in society did not appear to provide a problem for the pope. The major sticking point as far as Rome was concerned, was the issue of apostolic work, manifested in the debate about enclosure.

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[286] L. Gallagher, *'Mary Ward's Jesuitresses and the Construction of a Typological Community'*, in Frye, Maids and Mistresses, p.201.
[287] *Poyntz and Wigmore, v.16*

The first outline of the organisation, the *Schola Beatae Mariae* was dated at around 1611. The second, longer and more detailed exposition called the *Ratio Instituti* (1616) began by immediately identifying the order as active, rather than contemplative:

> As the sadly afflicted state of England, our native country, stands greatly in need of spiritual labourers, and as priests, both religious and secular respectively, work assiduously as Apostles in this harvest, it seems that the female sex also in its measure, should and can in like manner undertake something more than ordinary in this same spiritual necessity.[288]

Although this document did not mention the Society of Jesus, it is generally assumed that the organisation was based on similar ideals[289]. The evangelical nature of the work they aspired to do was a challenge to the post-Tridentine church which required religious women to be enclosed within a convent. In the mid-sixteenth century, the Council of Trent had reaffirmed the necessity of cloister for all women in religious communities, although change was very slow for those already established. The IBVM recognised the value of 'prayers and pious works'[290], but rejected this so that they could instead:

> devote ourselves, according to our slender capacity, to the performance of those works of Christian charity towards our neighbour which cannot be undertaken in convents[291].

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[288] Ratio Instituti, 1616, Translation from Latin in Chambers, Volume I, p. 375-376.
[289] The Heart and Mind of Mary Ward, p77.
[290] The Heart and Mind of Mary Ward, p.376.
[291] The Heart and Mind of Mary Ward, p. 376.

This 'mixed kind of life' may have differed dramatically from the convents sanctioned by Rome, but the IBVM cited a catalogue of notable predecessors to give weight to their undertaking:

> His Holy Mother... Saints Mary Magdalen, Praxedes, Prudentiana, Thecla, Cecilia, Lucy and many other holy virgins and widows[292].

Using citations of virtuous women from history was a common strategy of women writers throughout this period and has been found in many of the networks considered in this thesis. Like Alice Thornton, Lady Anne Clifford and Quaker women, the members of the IBVM collected their writings to pass on to subsequent generations. This would seem to have been prompted by a fear of a loss of identity and concern about the destruction of a female religious tradition. Many women identified role models from the past whose actions were worthy of veneration. While the receipt books of seventeenth-century gentlewomen provided expertise for the physical maintenance of the family, lists and stories recited by female religious provided the ingredients for female spiritual excellence.

Although there was opposition to freely socialising female religious organisations within the Catholic church, there were a number already in existence. Angela Merici had founded the Company of Ursulines in Italy in 1535, to help the poor, widows, orphans and the sick. The very popularity of the Ursulines led to their enforced claustration, however. As the vows the women took were not solemn, they

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[292] The Heart and Mind of Mary Ward, p.376

kept their inheritance rights and were therefore theoretically able to leave at any time. The enthusiasm of many wealthy families for the order as a suitable placement for their daughters meant that this aspect of their vows became a real threat to their finances and the pressure they brought to bear on the church establishment gradually lead to the enclosure of Ursuline houses and the legal "death" of their inhabitants[293].

Isabel Roser also followed a similar path to the women of the IBVM. She had been an associate of Ignatius Loyola in Spain and tried to establish an order of female Jesuits devoted to education, care of the sick and poor. However, the long term aim was to convert the people back to Catholicism. The idea of women working in close contact with lay people in an apostolic role was not found to be acceptable to either Loyola or Pope Paul III, who refused to grant approval.

The lack of official sanction did not reduce the popularity of the organisations in either of these examples, or in the case of the IBVM, but it would appear that it contributed to attempts to restrict their influence. Throughout their struggle to survive in the early seventeenth century, the women of the IBVM continually fought against the idea of enclosure or joining an alternative order. They rejected offers which could have made their lives simpler because of their belief in the need to work in a practical way in the real world. The movement only gained approval from the Pope in 1709, once the idea of enclosure was accepted. The adoption of an informal way of

[293] Wiesner, p. 197.

working, as individuals within their communities, could have avoided many of the difficulties faced by the women of the IBVM. However, there was no real place for single women in society at this time and they would have remained financially insecure.

The Activities of the IBVM

The day to day life of the members of the IBVM can be pieced together from their writing, letters and the "Painted Life", although the latter generally depicted more extraordinary events. Once the Institute was established in Europe, it spread fairly rapidly and a number of houses were set up in Germany, France, Italy, Flanders and Bavaria. Poyntz and Wigmore's account of Mary Ward's life, the *Breife Relation*, related that they 'eate but one meale a Day, lay on Straw-bedds only, with diverse other austerityes...as a meanes to obtayne light'[294]. The first aim of the women, to dedicate themselves to spiritual perfection, was in practical terms a process of:

> continual self-renunciation...meditation and vocal prayer, interior recollection and love of silence, exterior modesty of speech and demeanour'[295].

As well as private prayer, the women gathered together to worship. Their time was highly structured and organised:

> each hour was regularly divided, and each appointed to certain employments and not a moment of time was wasted[296]

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[294] *Breife Relation* v.16
[295] Father Lohner, Gottseliges Leben, pp. 63-64, quoted in Chambers, pp. 264-265.

Father Loher gave a detailed account of a typical day:

> The usual order of the day is this: At four o'clock in the morning they are awoke, and at half-past four they meditate for an hour; the rest of the time until eight o'clock is spent in hearing Mass, vocal prayers and spiritual reading; then they go to their business in the house or office, and remain thus until a quarter to ten, at which time the examen of conscience is performed for a quarter of an hour, and afterwards they go immediately to dinner. When dinner is ended a liberal recreation is granted until half-past twelve, after which half-an-hour is again passed in spiritual reading and then they betake themselves to their several duties in the house and their offices until five o'clock, from which time until six they apply themselves to vocal prayer. At six o'clock follow supper and recreation until eight, then they say together the Litanies of Our Lady and the Saints and whatever the Superioress enjoins, after which examen is made for a quarter of an hour, the points of meditation on the following day are read aloud, and the usual night's rest is taken.[297]

There was a great deal of administration to be done, writing letters, and communicating between the various institutes. Delegation of tasks was commended as a way to ensure that priorities were dealt with. Mary Ward wrote to Susanna Rookwood when she was a Superior at one of the institute's houses:

> You do very well...not to write yourself, but to despatch what business you would have done by others in your house...for a good superior cannot want work, and work of more importance than ordinary letters of compliment[298].

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[296] Father Loher, quoted in Chambers, p.264.
[297] *Father Loher, quoted in Chambers p.369-370.*
[298] Mary Ward to Susanna Rookwood, January 1624, copy at BC.

They took girls into the house as boarders, mainly from English Catholic families, and also operated a day school for local girls to attend without charge. Their pupils were taught:

> all that became good Christians and worthy women...qualityes to render them capable and fitt to doe God service.[299]

This included classical and modern languages, rhetoric, literature, drama, music, dancing, drawing and painting, as well as practical skills which could ensure the girls' economic survival[300]. The dramatic elements of the curriculum were considered very important in the development of character as well as culture and the girls wrote and adapted their own material. All of the members of the Institute were expected to learn the language of the country in which they were living and the mobility which was essential for the women at that time meant that many of the members were accomplished linguists. The teachers at the Institute's schools were all women who were members, but they were only permitted to teach if they had been properly trained. Their role was taken very seriously as an essential part of the work of the Institute:

> The girls are to be trained in self-discipline, to realise their duties towards God, their neighbour and themselves[301].

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[299] Diocesan archives, Augsburg, quoted in M. Oliver, Mary Ward 1585-1645, (London: Shed and Ward, 1960), p. 225.
[300] Oliver p. 227.
[301] Diocesan archives, Augsburg, quoted in Oliver, p. 225.

The period described above when the women were at St Omer was fairly stable, and it indicated just one view of the activities of the women, however. They travelled a great deal and obviously their activities varied in these circumstances. On such a journey, Mary Ward had the following routine:

> at first setting out, said our Blessed Lady's litanies...then made her hour of prayer. When done, she recreated herself with some profitable and cheerful discourse....If she had time and opportunity she did always eat before she set forth....At noon, she nor her companions never made any meal, but her servants she was careful should. In the afternoon she took time for her devotions....When arrived and in her chamber, she sought out some picture, before which kneeling down, she made an offer of herself and all her actions to be done in that place to the greatest honour and glory of God.[302]

In every part of their day to day lives, the women of the IBVM tried to combine their two stated aims of dedicating themselves to God but also remaining active, so Mary Ward offered not only herself, but also her actions to God. All work was interspersed with prayer and meditation.

In England, living and teaching openly was not possible, therefore alternatives were developed. The institute was set up at the heart of fashionable London, relying on social prestige to prevent discovery, but when pursuivants came too close, they used the protection of supporters such as 'a Protestant, and powerful in regard of the office he held'[303]. The times required great flexibility and the IBVM showed themselves to be uniquely adaptable. Sister Dorothea ran a "school" in

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[302] Breife Relation, quoted in Chambers, 490-491.
[303] Gallager, p. 202.

Suffolk by teaching the Institute's curriculum to children in their own homes. She presented herself as a lay-sister, acting as a missionary in precisely the way that had been envisaged by the founders, converting people to Catholicism and encouraging a more active resistance in those who conformed to the recusancy laws[304].

Further sources of the activities of the IBVM indicate that they may have been involved in providing services for Catholics in England in the absence of a priest. In a satirical pamphlet John Stockden "a yeoman" detailed the case of seven women living together in Covent Garden in 1641 'unto whom did daily many assemble themselves, not onely for absolution, but distraction'[305]. Although he did not name the Institute, it is possible that these were women of the IBVM, working in a covert way.

Opposition to the Activities of the IBVM

When Mary Ward stated: 'My confessor resisted, all the Society opposed'[306] she could well have been talking about dozens of events in her own life and that of the IBVM. When an organisation has a strong opposition it can be seen to define itself by its difference. So, at this time Catholicism in England was defined by the presence of Protestantism. In many ways opposition and persecution were the frame

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[304] Chambers, p. 203.
[305] *John Stockden, The Seven Women Confessors, (1641) p.4.*

for the work of the IBVM. The professed aim of the women was to carry out their work with English people, thereby preventing the destruction of their faith in their home country. Their activities in exile throughout Europe were in no way a replacement for what they considered to be their duty - to help to save the souls of the people of England. It was their active role which marked the women out for particular condemnation in England, however.

The trauma of the Reformation in England and subsequent upheaval throughout the sixteenth century as monarchs changed the religion of the country over the heads of the people, led to a fear of extremist religion and legislation to match. While up to the 1570s Marian priests were widely tolerated, laws after this time became more harsh, particularly when applied to religious personnel coming into the country from the continent. As the identity of England became more closely connected with the Protestantism of its people, Roman Catholics were seen as traitors.[307] In this environment, Marotti has identified the two most dangerous figures in the history of English nationalism as the recusant Catholic woman and the Jesuit missionary priest:

> Woman and Catholicism were both feared as intrinsically idolatrous, superstitious and carnal, if not also physically disgusting[308].

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[306] Mary Ward, Letter to Mgr Albergati, quoted in Orchard, p.33.
[307] A. Marotti, 'Alienating Catholics in Early Modern England: Recusant Women, Jesuits and Ideological Fantasies', in Marotti, editor, Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern Catholic Texts, (London: MacMillan, 1999) p.2.
[308] Marotti, p. 4.

Plate 3: 'Painted Life'
(Bar Convent)

This painting shows the women of the IBVM travelling from England to Europe. They travelled widely and generally wore clothes appropriate to their social status.

The women of the IBVM combined both of these categories by being both female and emissaries of the Catholic Church. As they did not conform to the idea of a regular order for women by wearing a habit, they were also less easy to identify and feared as a threat to men who may have been "seduced" by them into recusancy. The menace of the women of the IBVM was seen as greater than other Catholics: '[Mary Ward] alone did more harm than six Jesuits'[309].

In Middleton's anti-Catholic, anti-Spanish play 'A Game at Chesse', the association of Jesuits and women was presented as particularly dangerous. Ignatius Loyola was portrayed as a manipulative politician with Mary Ward as the Black Queen's Pawn, his daughter:

> I am my selfe a secular Jesuitesse,
> As many Ladies are of worth and greatnesse[310]

Middleton represented the relationship between Loyola and the IBVM as a father and dependent daughters:

> so will hee cherish
> All his young tractable sweete daughters
> E'ene in his armes, in his owne bosome[311]

He provided a contradiction in doing so however, as although the women were seen to be easily manipulated by Loyola, 'induc'd by noble Personages, / Into great

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[309] *Breife Relation*, quoted in Chambers, p.407.
[310] Middleton, A Game at Chesse, (1625) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), I.ii. L .45-46.
[311] Middleton, I.ii.L .42-44.

Princes services', they were also significant enough to be 'true labourers in the worke/Of universall Monarchy'[312]. The impression that the women provided sexual favours is given by the nuances in the exchange between the Black Queen's Pawn and the White Queen's Pawn. However, the most potentially damaging aspect of the presentation of Mary Ward and the IBVM in *A Game at Chesse* was the betrayal of the White Queen's Pawn by her counterpart, another woman. The discussion between the Black Bishop and the Black Queen's Pawn revealed a hidden purpose in the interchange between the two women:

> Blacke Bishop: Dost finde her supple?
> Blacke Queen's Pawn: There's a little passage made.[313]

The inference was clearly made that the Black Queen's Pawn had been preparing the White Queen's Pawn for seduction, testing her pliability and acting as a procuress. This attempted to deny the fact that one of the main functions of the IBVM was to act as a network to aid and support women and girls. It tried to reintroduce the idea that women cannot work together and will always be in competition with each other, also explored in Middleton's *Women Beware Women*. The success of the IBVM was partly due its opposition to this philosophy and the ability of its members to work co-operatively against their critics.

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[312] Middleton, I.ii.L. 55-56.
[313] Middleton, I.ii.L. 74-75.

Much of the condemnation of the IBVM from Protestant critics also intended to discredit them by questioning their chastity and modesty. The connection between religious women and prostitutes is one which has a long history. The dichotomy of good/evil, sinner/penitent, angel/ whore, can be seen in writing throughout the ages, from the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene onwards. However, it is not only from such simplistic ideas as good versus evil that links can be found between the women of the IBVM and prostitutes. They actively went abroad to 'seek out women of doubtful lives and prepare[d] them to receive the grace of the sacraments'[314]. By mixing with women of dubious reputation, they ran the risk of being judged by association, although it would seem that women really only had to cohabit for suspicions of immoral living to arise.

John Stockden certainly appeared to have made assumptions about the seven women living together at a house in Queen Street, London in 1641:'Amongst these seven female confessors was there but one old woman, which was Mistress Wels, the other young and handsome'[315]. They were said 'publicly to shew their faces, impudently resolved to supply their places', therefore did not conform to the religious ideal. They were living in an area of London which was well known as containing a high percentage of Catholic households:

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[314] Third Plan of the Institute, quoted in Oliver, Til God Will, p. 64.
[315] Stockden, Seven Confessors, (1641)

> so replenished with Priests and their people, that they openly call one another to goe to Masse...as familiarly as one neighbour will call another to goe to one of our Churches[316].

Even though they were housed in a predominately Catholic neighbourhood, Stockden appeared to have been confused as to what was being offered by the women, but was 'willing to have a wench'. His manner of describing events does seem to suggest a brothel:

> a piece of silver in hand...was paid as an offering to the cheife Matron Katherine Wels, then of the seven might he chuse his confessor, which goes presently into a room with them, or her[317].

The secrecy which surrounded Catholic activities must have certainly have led to misunderstandings, as in this case, but Stockden 's denunciation of the women followed an all too familiar pattern: 'they stuff their purses with gold, and their bellies with children'. His mistaken assumption that they were selling sexual favours did not prevent him from continuing to defame the women by saying that they were likely to have illegitimate children from their illicit activities.

Accusations of loose morals were levelled at the IBVM, not only from Protestants, but also from seminary clergy in England to whom the innovative and successful methods of the women were a threat. Robert Sherwood, a monk, wrote in his propaganda document 'Sherwood's Petition', that:

> They are idle and talkative
> They boast of their freedom from enclosure

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[316] The Black Box of Roome Opened, (1641) p. 18.
[317] Stockden, Seven Confessors, (1641).

They do not conform to feminine modesty[318]

They were given various derogatory names: Galloping nuns, Jesuitresses, Wandering Gossips, She-Apostles, Galloping Girls, Rogerites (inferring that the institute's founder was Father Roger Lee). The criticism aimed at the IBVM was generally that which was also applied to other women who drew attention to themselves for any reason. As with Quaker women, their mobility aroused great suspicion, particularly as the women travelled the continent, often in disguise. James Wadsworth's *The English Spanish Pilgrime* related that: 'They walke abroad in the world, and preach the Gospell to their sex in England and elsewhere'[319]. Almost identical criticism was levelled at many other groups of religious women from Protestant sects later in the seventeenth century including Quakers and Fifth Monarchists.

A closed order would have effectively provided an answer to all of the opposition to the women by physically imposing a boundary to their voice, movement and sexual presence. Women who were perceived as a threat were criticised not for their views or for their purposeful activities, but for the fact that they were not prepared to be contained and constrained in a physical or verbal sense.

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[318] Robert Sherwood, Sherwood's Petition, Orchard, p.50.
[319] James Wadsworth, The English Spanish Pilgrime, (1629) STC 24926, EB Reel 1368 p.30. This pamphlet was written by James Wadsworth who claimed to have been trained as a Jesuit before converting to the Church of England and printing his denunciation of 'Spanish Popery and Jesuiticall Strategems' in 1629.

The ultimate imposition of this can be seen in the imprisonment of the women by the Catholic Church because of their refusal to conform. Although they were often persecuted by Protestant states, the most devastating blow to their activities was the suppression of the Institute by the Vatican in the early 1630s. Mary Ward was arrested and imprisoned in 'appropriate accommodation in a monastery called Anger, belonging to the Order of St Clare'[320]. Her punishment was physical containment and it was also intended that her voice should be silenced: she was 'closely guarded and no nuns [were] allowed to communicate with her, nor can they send her any letters'[321]. Letters written in lemon juice were smuggled out with details of the efforts made to make her conform:

> The Lady Abbess is full of my writings: she has been in some hope that I may enter here, since my first vows, she tells me, were in St Clare's Order, but I pretend not to understand[322].

It is ironic that the punishment for accusations against the institute should result Mary Ward entering the sort of religious community that she and her companions had fought so hard to avoid.

Internal Struggles

The persecution of hostile states and enemies within the Catholic church was dealt with in a pragmatic fashion. As with other organisations under pressure, the

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[320] Elizabeth Cotton, Circular Letter to Members of IBVM, (1631), quoted in Orchard, p.103.
[321] Cotton, p. 105.

opposition seemed to give the women strength and resolve. Within the Institute however, disunity created devastation. There is really only one well documented case of division within the IBVM. In 1619, the two IBVM communities in Liege were in turmoil as a member called Sister Praxedes claimed that she was truly enlightened and should replace Mary Ward as the Superior of the Institute. She was a relatively new member of the Institute, but she had the support of some men from the Society of Jesus who had withheld their support from the IVBM until that time. The situation became very serious, as she had been in communication with another religious order and proposed that the IBVM should adopt their rule of life.

The response to this was immediate, but also quite unusual - Mary Ward went into a retreat:

> in a sea of uncertainties and full of fears as to my ability to do anything, howsoever little, without some powerful and extraordinary help, calling to God for his, and receiving his to that purpose[323].

She put the future of the Institute into God's hands and related the outcome:

> turning to God with intent to confess my own nothing, I found (that by force of will against knowledge) I would still be of importance[324].

Mary Ward believed that God had directed the development of the Institute and therefore if Sister Praxedes was truly following God's will then she was prepared to follow her. However, her own meditations proved to her that she was 'of importance'

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[322] Mary Ward, Letter written in Lemon juice, February 1631, BC Photograph of original. (Lemon juice can be used as a crude "invisible ink". The paper is heated on receipt and the words become visible.)
[323] Mary Ward, Letter to Fr John Gerard, April 1619, printed in Chambers, Vol. I, pp. 452-4

and she resolved to maintain her own position. By the time Mary Ward had returned from her retreat, Sister Praxedes was dead. This sequence of events has echoes in the incident that Alice Thornton related about the friend who betrayed her[325]. In both cases the women creating the problem died quite suddenly, from a relatively minor disease, retracting all charges against the accused before death. Chambers asserted that: 'Almighty God visibly interfered on behalf of Mary and for the clearer demonstration of His own will'[326] in the same way that Alice Thornton believed that her friend's death vindicated her own actions. The belief of these women that God was with them and inspiring their activities gave them the confidence to continue against all opposition and persecution.

Conclusion

The IBVM was founded at a time in England when there was no place for women outside of the family. The Protestant Reformation had removed legitimate sites for female religious activity and presented marriage and childbearing as the most appropriate roles for women. The Reformation also presented a radical change in ideas about sexuality within marriage; it became an expression of the divine institution of marriage, made by God for the purpose of expressing human sexuality. Luther saw sexual desire as a natural appetite:

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[324] Mary Ward , 'Of Death' Chambers, p.541.
[325] Chapter 3, p. 96.

> nature must flow according to its manner...so that it would be better if man and wife were with each other as God created and nature gives[327].

It was perhaps inevitable that some Catholic women would rebel against this prescribed and vigorously enforced vocation by creating an extreme alternative. What could be further removed from the idea of a marriage complete with unrestricted sexual relations than to choose abstinence? Dedicating their lives to God and remaining chaste would seem to have been the most radical answer to the Protestant drive towards family life for all, even clergy. Defining themselves in the light of their opposition, the women chose the path that would make them stand out the most. Throughout the seventeenth century the women were acting as a group proscribed by the state. Although they initially began their work in the North of England, their very visibility necessitated moving to the capital and then abroad to ensure their survival. Their purpose remained the same however, and their aim to bring their movement back to Northern England was underlined by the determination of the women to return and remain in Yorkshire, even during the upheaval of the Civil War in the 1640s.

Their role within the Catholic Church was no less radical as it attempted to change the basic Post-Tridentine Catholic church. The issue of enclosure for religious women was a key part of the redevelopment of Catholicism and was

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[326] Chambers, p. 455.
[327] Martin Luther, *quoted in* L. Roper, 'Luther: Sex, Marriage and Motherhood', *in* History Today, Volume 33 Dec 1983, p.35.

designed to prevent a re-occurrence of the convent scandals of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The women of the IBVM were aware of their difference, acknowledged the nature of their activities and accepted their radical role within the church. They could have reduced the amount of opposition to their movement by working around the church statutes and disguising the full extent of their activities. However, they wanted official recognition from the church hierarchy which would have changed the nature of Catholicism across Europe. Formal acceptance of their organisation would have pushed the church in their direction and given the women a parallel role to the most active and radical male missionaries. As individual women, they could have been ignored or discredited, but it was very difficult for the church to castigate a group as widespread and popular as the IBVM. Although many of the Institute's houses were closed by Rome in the 1630s, the work which the women had been doing was deemed so valuable that local communities, and monarchs in some cases, supported the women and ensured their survival.

Throughout the seventeenth century, the status of the IBVM moved between formal and informal recognition. Although their own aims and objectives remained constant, the extent to which their activities were recognised or condemned depended on where the boundaries of the Roman Catholic Church were set at that time. When the Church was fairly flexible they fitted inside its parameters as a legitimate religious group. However once women's roles became more closely

prescribed the IBVM were placed outside of official church practice. At no point did they attempt to break away from the Catholic Church and become an alternative religious organisation. Their efforts were concentrated on becoming part of the formal institution.

The women's insistence on their own importance to the Catholic church and their belief in the work they did gave them faith to continue. However, the most valuable tools they had at their disposal were the networks that they had created and maintained, their own public world which acted as a buffer, support and defence against the persecution of their work, ideas and religion.

Chapter 5
Formal Women's Networks? The Society of Friends' Women's Meetings

The Society of Friends women's meetings were developed in the second half of the seventeenth century as an integral part of the formal organisation of their society. Although slightly later than the IBVM, these women's meetings are nevertheless one of the earliest examples of separate, formal organisations for women. This chapter will look at the form, purpose and place of the women's meetings within the Society of Friends. The women's meetings were part of the national movement, therefore their development will be considered nationally before focusing attention on north-east England. This chapter will examine the reasons why women's networks became part of the official structure of the organisation and suggest that the formalisation of women's existing informal networks may have been an effort by the Society of Friends to present a certain image to the rest of society.

Women were drawn in significant numbers to many of the Protestant sects which were formed in the seventeenth century and they participated enthusiastically in religious life. The Protestant idea of a personal relationship with God which did not need a priest as mediator has been seen as a liberating one for many women, who are thought to have found themselves freed from dependence on clergy and able to communicate directly with God. Although there were many Catholic women,

such as Mary Ward, who related their experiences of religion as a direct connection with God and in some instances received a response in the form of a vision, the emphasis of the reformed religion was more firmly on the individual:

> the God of the Reformers was a transcendent one, not influenced by pilgrimages or surrounded by a group of semi-divine saints who could serve as intermediaries[328].

In theory, this philosophy meant that any person, regardless of gender or social status, could justify their words and actions as being the result of communication with God. The reality generally fell far short of this, however. Katherine Zell, a Strasbourg reformer, was prompted by criticism to request that her religious writings should be judged:

> not according to the standards of a woman, but according to the standards of one whom God has filled with the Holy Spirit[329].

The idea of equality before God gave women a sense of power, even if their society did not allow them to transform the idea into something more tangible.

After the Reformation in England, the Anglican Church continued to emphasise the priestly role, and the national church structure changed little. However, other reformed religions with different organisational structures flourished at this time. The predominance of women and artisans in the early days of the Society of Friends can be explained by the fact that they constituted a sector of

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[328] M. Weisner, Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 186.

society which would otherwise be excluded from any position of social, political or religious authority[330]. Chapter 2 has discussed Rosaldo's ideas about the position of women in society[331]. She suggested that women's position could be raised if they were able to challenge masculine claims to authority, either by taking on men's roles or by establishing female social ties and creating a world in which women prevailed. By 1691, it is estimated that up to 4% of the female population in England were Quakers[332] and from the very beginning women played a key role in the development of the movement. It is thought that the puritan ideal of equal recognition of all worshippers irrespective of gender or social position created an environment where women felt accepted and valued. However, to accept the existence of these meetings as evidence of equality in the Society of Friends, would be taking them at face value only.

The Place of Women in the Society of Friends

The members of the Society of Friends were generally regarded as espousing views which fostered equality between all sectors of society. The tendency of women to be speakers

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[329] Wiesner, p.188.
[330] K. Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War Sects', Past and Present no.13 1958, pp.317-340.
[331] See Chapter 2 p.35-37
[332] O. Hufton, p.415. A pamphlet published in 1659 gives what it states are the names of seven thousand women from the Society of Friends. Mary Forster, These several papers was sent to the Parliament the Twentieth day of the fifth Moneth, 1659. Being above seven thousand of the names of the Handmaids and Daughters of the Lord, (London: Mary Westwood, 1659).On closer examination a significant number of these would appear to have been repeated, thus reducing the overall total. It does point to a sizeable movement, however.

and preachers in the early modern period was perceived as ahead of its time: 'the equality of men and women in spiritual privilege and responsibility... [was]one of the glories of Quakerism'[333]. However, it appears to have been beyond the capabilities of many of the people of the seventeenth century to separate a woman's religious persona from the socially accepted view of women as inferior and secondary citizens. Despite a philosophy of equality, women appear to have been treated differently to men in the Society of Friends at this time. The organisation of women's meetings can be seen as a move to put women into: 'their place, their right place, and to stir them up to take it'[334]. It is clear however, that a woman's place was not seen as being in the central meetings where they might have been in a position to hold dominion over the men.

Women speaking out in mixed gender meetings were often viewed with derision and scorn, even by those who otherwise supported female involvement. Female speech in seventeenth-century England was generally seen in a negative light, as the numerous texts exploring women's speech and silence testify[335]. George Fox, who was accepted as the principal founder of the Society of Friends, criticised women who: 'will be at the heel of the

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[333] W. Braithwaite, The Second Period of Quakerism, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961) p.270.
[334] Braithwaite, p. 273.
[335] Female public speech was often equated with promiscuity, a connection observed by many of the writers of this period, both male and female. It was assumed that a woman who controls her own speech may also control her sexuality, thus threatening her husband with cuckoldry and ridicule. The use of the scold's bridle on Quaker women is further evidence of the strength of feeling against public speaking by women and the also of the attempt to frighten them into silence. This argument is explored by Gowing, 'Language, power and the law: women's slander litigation in early modern England', in Kermode and Walker, pp.26-47.

quarterly meeting and would order it as they please'[336]. One explanation for women's enthusiasm for public speaking and men's impatience with it is given by Fogelklou who suggests that, in the event of a lack of inspiration during the meetings:

> commonplace reiterations following logical grooves are to men less irritating than emotional ejaculations and other unspeakable or contradictory remarks, to which women are apt to resort when they want to break away from the beaten track.[337]

Within society as a whole, women preachers were persecuted and condemned. Dorothy Waugh suffered a particularly unpleasant experience at the hands of the people of Carlisle. In *The Lambs Defence Against Lyes* she stated:

> I was moved of the Lord to goe to the market of Carlile , to speak against all deceit & ungodly practices ...whereby they tare my Clothes to put on their bridle as they called it, which was a stone weight of iron... & three barrs of iron to come over my face, and a piece of it was put in my mouth[338].

The viciousness of this punishment for public speaking was not unusual and this instance appears to epitomise the attitude of wider society to Quaker women's activities. The early radicals encouraged vocal enthusiasm for their particular expressions of worship, but by the end of the seventeenth century it was women such as Ann Audland who were held up as an example to others:

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[336] George Fox quoted in Dorothy Ludlow, 'Sectarian Women in England 1641-1700', in R.L. Greaves, Triumph over Silence, (London: Greenwood Press, 1985) p.113.
[337] E., Fogelklou, James Naylor, (London: Ernest Benn, 1931) p. 141. This quote perhaps exposes the prejudices of the writer and the time in which this study was written, but nonetheless gives an indication of what might be have been considered an acceptable view of women's self expression.
[338] Dorothy Waugh, A Relation Concerning Dorothy Waugh's cruel usage by the Mayor of Carlile, (1656), Wing L249.

> She had wisdom to know the time and season of her service....and she was grieved when any, especially of her sex, should be too hasty, forward, or unseasonable[339]

It would seem that although the Society of Friends theoretically believed in equality this did not extend to public speaking, even within their movement. The creation of meetings for women only can be viewed in two ways. Either the women were segregated and marginalised by their meetings, or they were given freedom and autonomy by having their own meetings. The key to this issue is whether the women's meetings were created and instigated by the women themselves, or by others within the movement.

The Origins of Separate Women's Meetings

There is some debate about the origins of the national Women's Meetings[340]. Edwards has suggested that the meetings sprang from Sarah Blackbury's call in the winter of 1659 for women to assist in alleviating the plight of sick and poor Friends in London, where persecution had led to many heads of household being imprisoned[341]. To suggest that this was the beginning of Quaker women meeting and working together would be erroneous,

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[339] Ann Whitehead, Piety Promoted, (1680) EEB Reel 930, p.208.
[340] Whitehead, pp. 146-149.
[341] I. L. Edwards, 'The Women Friends of London: The Two Weeks and Box Meetings', Journal of the Friends Historical Society, no. 47 1955, p3. For further discussion see also Hobby, "Come to Live a Preaching Life': Female Community in Seventeenth-Century Radical Sects', in R. D'Monte and N. Pohl, editors, Female Communities 1600-1800: Literary Visions and Cultural Realities, (London: MacMillan Press, 2000) and K. M. Wilcox, Theology and Women's Ministry in Seventeenth-Century English Quakerism, (Lampeter: Edward Mellen Press, 1995).

however. Over sixty women were gathered together at only a few hours notice, which suggests that the women were able to use their already existing informal networks to communicate and organise. The minutes of the meetings gave little indication of the relationships of the women beyond the formal gatherings. Other sources are more helpful, however.

Testimonies to recently deceased members such as Ann Whitehead gave a vivid account of the friends and colleagues that she worked alongside[342]. They detailed the importance of informal connections and the overlap between family, friends and working acquaintances in such a close community. The early women's meetings suggested that they acted separately from the men initially so that they could concentrate their energies on providing for the needy in a crisis. The Two-Weeks and Box meetings appear to have been the first meetings which were separately organised by the women themselves.

With established involvement in the everyday running of the Friends' activities and a clearly articulated right to preach and worship on an equal footing with the male Quakers, it would seem unnecessary for the women to have their own separate meetings. George Fox argued that: 'The Lamb of God... is but one in all His males and females, sons and daughters'[343]. However, there is evidence that Quaker women acted autonomously from

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[342] Theophilia Townsend, A Testimony Concerning the Life and Death of Jane Whitehead, (1676) EEB Reel 583:6.
[343] George Fox, The Woman Learning in Silence, (1656).

the mid 1650s, when a group of women petitioned Parliament[344]. Their independent action followed an earlier petition by a group of men. The women's petition could be attributed to prompting from their male colleagues, or a strategy to deflect criticism away from the men who were more likely to be severely punished. Although women did not flinch from taking punishment, men were seen as generally more culpable. In the preface to their petition, Mary Forster stated that: 'It may seem strange that women should appear in so publick a manner'[345]. She used the fact that it was unusual for women to petition Parliament in her favour. By drawing attention to this, she highlighted both the importance of the issue and the strength of the women's feelings, that they would place themselves into the public domain in such a way.

Almost from the very beginning of the Society of Friends however, there were gendered conflicts. In the 1660s, the attempt to spread the women's meetings throughout the country seemed to centre on Margaret Fell. By 1672, a rift had developed between Margaret Fell and John Story and his followers, superficially over the necessity of holding women's meetings. Story believed that separate meetings for women were 'monstrous and ridiculous'[346] and prompted a rebuttal by George Fox who said that: 'all our men and women's meetings...are for the practice of religion and to see that all do profess truth, do

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[344]Mary Forster, *et al*, These Several Papers was sent to the Parliament the twentieth day of the fifth Moneth, 1659. Being above seven thousand of the Names of the Hand-Maids and Daughters of the Lord, *(1659) Wing F1605, EEB Reel 316. Precedents for women petitioners can be found in B.* Manning, editor, Politics, Religion and the English Civil War, (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), and A. Button, *'Royalist women petitioners in SW England 1655-62'*, Seventeenth Century Journal 15 2000.
[345] Forster, p. 1.
[346] Kunze, p. 149.

practice and walk in it'[347]. George Fox intervened and appeared to take credit for the formation of the meetings, thereby deflecting attention away from Margaret Fell who had become a focus for the dissenters in their attempt to maintain authority within the movement. Margaret Fell's determination to ignore criticism and continue with her work in promoting the women's meetings moved George Fox to request privately that she should:

> be wise and if you do leave Westmoreland Women's Meeting to themselves a while and let their spirits cool and not strive for the power'[348]

Publicly however, Fox professed unwavering support for the Women's Meetings. His justification for the Women's Meetings came from their origins in a request from God and this can be seen as an attempt to disperse the opposition to separate meetings:

> I was sent out by the Lord God, in his eternal light and power, to preach the word of the life...and so after I had received this and preached it...I was moved to advise the setting up of the men's Monthly and Quarterly Meetings, and the women's meetings[349].

By including the women's meetings with the already established and accepted meetings, Fox forced anyone questioning the validity of one to also question the others and put their reasoning against the will of God.

It would seem credible, however, that the women's meetings were an easy target in the power struggle between two different factions within the movement. The formation of separate Women's Meetings coincided with the movement towards a

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[347] *Kunze, p. 149.*
[348] George Fox, Journal, quoted in Kunze, p. 150.
[349] *Kunze, p. 150.*

more formal structuring of the Society of Friends. The persecution of the 1660-80s drove the Quakers towards conservatism and respectability, via organisation. George Fox was always aware of the necessity to maintain a respectable image in a hostile world:

> the object of Fox was to strengthen government by laying it, both as a privilege and a responsibility, upon the whole body of honest-hearted Friends.[350].

To provide a robust organisation, capable of withstanding the persecution and criticisms heaped upon it, George Fox believed that responsibility needed to be spread across the whole body of Friends, lessening the likelihood of factional and political splits. In his analysis of this period of development within the Society of Friends, Reay has suggested that:

> It was perhaps inevitable that the anarchical implications of the doctrine of the light within would have to be tempered by some form of group control if the movement was to avoid fragmentation into a thousand competing faiths.[351]

The second generation of Friends began to take the movement away from the spontaneity of unregulated groups and meetings towards an orderly structure of local, regional and national business meetings. Partly in response to the Declarations of Indulgence(1672&1687) and the Toleration Act (1689) meeting houses began to replace the casual and open air meetings of the earlier period and

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[350]Braithwaite, p. 269.
[351] B. Reay, The Quakers and the English Revolution, (London: Temple Smith, 1985) p.121.

coherent sermons given by certified preachers were heard instead of confrontational prophesy.

Unfortunately, the creation of less flexible structures was generally detrimental to most women, for whom the demands of family and children were likely to have provided a counter-weight to attendance at meetings. The provision of meetings for women outside of the usual business meetings was part of the development of the society at this time:

> once the necessity for structure and rationality became of paramount concern, the "feminine", or liminal aspects of the movement began to be viewed as suspect[352].

It would appear that in an effort to achieve acceptance within wider society, the Society of Friends created a tight structure for their organisation which would be able to demonstrate visible order and discipline, particularly over those 'unruly' members who spoke or acted in a way which might attract attention.

However, this structure also multiplied the numbers of meetings that members would have to attend. If they wanted to remain influential then they needed to be part of many of the management meetings as well as the Women's Meetings. The 'Second-Day Morning's Meeting' of male Friends was specifically set up to edit and censure texts for publication (resulting in a uniformity of writing which has been

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[352] P. Mack, Visionary Women, (London: University of California Press, 1992) p.275.

particularly disappointing to those studying female writers of this period[353]). The male only panel had a huge influence on the sorts of texts by Quaker women which made their way into print at this time[354]. Even George Fox underestimated their effect on publication. When they refused to approve some of his own work he complained in a letter to London Women Friends: 'I was not moved to set up that meeting to make orders against the reading of my papers'[355]. Enforced quietening of the female authorial voice was combined with women's exclusion from positions of official power within the rest of the movement as a bureaucratic hierarchy developed.

Women's Meetings in the North-east

It was at the height of this restructuring that the north-east women's meetings were developed. The organisation of the general business meetings in the Northumberland area was laid out in a document in 1680: 'A quarterly meeting to be held here at Otterburne...the last fifth day of each third month'[356]. An orderly system of weekly, monthly and yearly meetings was set up in the North-east which echoed that of other regions and included the women's meetings. The formation of the women's meetings generally assumed their exclusion from the other business

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[353] H. Smith, and S. Cardinale, Women and the Literature of the Seventeenth Century, (Westport: Connecticut, 1990).
[354] For discussion of Quaker publishing, see T. O'Malley, "Defying the Powers and Tempering the Spirit': A Review of Quaker Control over their Publications 1672-1689', Journal of Ecclesiastical History Volume 33 (1) January 1982.
[355] George Fox, quoted in Braithwaite, p. 280.
[356] Monthly Meeting Minute Book, Northumberland, 28th day 8th month 1680, MF218, T&W.

meetings within the society. This appears to be corroborated by the existing documents of the general monthly and quarterly meetings in the North-east which have no female signatories on minutes stretching well into the eighteenth century.

When considering female participation in meetings, this may be misleading, however. The minute of a Quarterly Meeting in 1685 states that 'ye next quarterly meeting be at Elinor Hixson att Whelpington'[357]. This would suggest that women were likely to have been present and participated in the meetings without being formally acknowledged in the minutes. Besse recounted that :

> Meeting at Jane Vickers in Raby were taken from George Dickson, Henry Grainger, William Grainger, William Pickering, Jane Vickers and Katherine Temple, goods to the value of 20l 5s. [358]

The meeting actually took place at the home of Jane Vickers and while it was in progress, officers intervened and took away her goods as fines. Other meetings in the same area were held at the home of Margaret Crawford. It appears that despite separately organised meetings with specific aims, women and men were still gathering together to discuss Society of Friends business affairs.

When John and Sarah Tyzack relocated to London in 1687 a Certificate of Removal was produced to assist in their acceptance by Friends in their new neighbourhood. It was produced by the Monthly Meeting at Gateshead and signed

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[357] *Quarterly Meeting 30th day 11th month 1685, MF218, T&W.*
[358] Joseph Besse, A Collection of the Sufferings of the People Called Quakers, (London:Luke Hinde, 1753) *p. 182.*

by thirty seven different people, of whom sixteen were women. The document was produced to vouch for the good character of John and Sarah Tyzacke. The document could have treated them completely separately, in the same way that marriages were "cleared" by the men's and women's meetings individually. The couple were discussed as individuals in the document, but it was produced by a mixed meeting. It would appear that the women had influence and input into the running of the Society of Friends in the North-east of England which was unacknowledged and apparently hidden to a casual observer.

Although it is important to place the north-east meetings in the national context, assumptions made from general discussions about the women's meetings from a general view of the meetings may be misleading. A close and detailed analysis of specific meetings reveals that the separation on paper of the women's meetings from the men's may owe more to an attempt to appease the rest of society than a need within the movement. At a local level the inclusion of the women was vital to the survival of the movement.

Who were the members of the Women's Meetings?

The women's meetings in north-east England appear to have been started in the late 1670s, probably in response to the call for their establishment at the London Yearly Meeting of 1675. 'The First Minute' of the women's Quarterly Meeting at Durham was

written in 1679. The Quarterly meetings gathered together representatives from the monthly meetings in twelve towns and cities covering an area from Yarm in North Yorkshire to Newcastle Upon Tyne and 'Darwan Water' in Northumberland.

The women involved in the early Quaker women's meetings in the north-east were mainly from an artisanal background, with weavers, shoemakers and mariners commonly stated as their father's or husband's occupations[359]. It is known that Margaret Fell's daughter Bridget, an educated gentlewoman married John Draper of Headlam and moved into the area, but there is no mention of her in extant documents and Steel suggests that she probably died at a young age[360]. The documents of the women's meetings were obviously written by the more literate members, but they all signed the minutes without any indication of status. The women were encouraged to 'also give their servants what liberty they can to go to meetings'[361], indicating the diversity of the members across social groups. The meetings embraced both servants and their employers without discrimination. The payment of '10s to a travelling Woman Friend who was kept prisoner at Durham several weeks on Truth's account'[362] indicated that for many, poverty was a personal issue. It would certainly be unusual for the women to wealthy in their own right.

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[359] Information from Society of Friends Birth and Marriage registers 1662-1674. MF 176 Tyne and Wear Archives. Many entries have no occupation stated, but those which are complete state mainly artisanal occupations.
[360] J.W. Steel, Early Friends in the North, (London: Headley, 1905) p. 16.
[361] WQM at York, 28th 11th Month 1709, MF 181, T&W.
[362] WQM at Durham, 6th 11th Month 1679, T&W.

The deliberate blurring of social boundaries that occurred within the Society of Friends, where all were equal before God, may have seemed more disruptive in the male world of hierarchy by occupation and birth. Although women were certainly aware of social boundaries and status they were often seen as 'classless' by virtue of their secondary status within whichever part of the social strata they resided. It is possible that the drawing together of women from diverse backgrounds gave them additional strength as a group with the realisation of the similarities in their common subordinate position.

Those women who attended the Society of Friends Women's Meetings in the seventeenth century were all women belonging to the organisation, but aside from a few well known women such as Margaret Fell, Sarah Blackbury and Elizabeth Hooten, little is known about the ordinary member. The Minute of the Women's Monthly Meeting[363] in Durham, 1680, gave 23 names:

Joan Linton	Sarah Stockton	Jane Vickers
Elizabeth Hopper of -ston	Martha Hall	Jane Primrose
Elizabeth Hopper of Durham	Jane Fisher	Alice Chilton
Margaret Heighington	Susanna Hapswell	Bridget Pinder
Katherine Leighton	Mary Lydell the Elder	
Susanna Hall	Mary Lydell the Younger	
Sarah Fisher	Mary Tonstall	
Mary Wilkinson	Elizabeth Fuister	
Mary Draper	Sarah Mason	

[363] The First Minute, Durham Women's Meeting, 1679, Ass.840/1 T&W.

Apart from their names, little is known about the majority of the women who attended the early meetings. This list of names gives very little information on its own, apart from the likelihood of more than one generation of the same family belonging to the meeting.

Some of the women were recorded as the wives or daughters of artisans and craftsmen. Jane Fisher was the daughter of Moses, a feltmaker, and his wife Margaret[364]. She died in 1691 and was buried in Gateshead. It is likely that Jane was a single woman, as her parents are named in the register relating to her death, rather than it containing details of her husband or widowhood. Bridget Pinder, who died in 1684, was the wife of a mercer from North Shields. Joan Linton(1631-1715) appeared in at least five documents relating to Women's Meetings in this region. She was married to Robert Linton(1633-1716), a salt pan owner, and lived in South Shields. In 1676 she sent a present of wine to Swarthmoor Hall,[365] home of Margaret Fell and George Fox. She had a number of children who married into local Quaker families and she and her husband were described as 'useful members of the Quaker Church at Gateshead'[366]. Her daughter, also Joan, married "Mr Brown" of Whitley[367] in 1698 and moved to North Shields, dying in 1743.

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[364] Register of Births, Marriages and Deaths, MF176, T & W.
[365] Sarah Fell, The Household Account Book of Sarah Fell of Swarthmoor Hall, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920).
[366] J. Steel, Friends in Newcastle and Gateshead 1653-1898, p.39.
[367] Although Mr Brown is listed as coming from Whitby in the records, it would appear more likely that this is Whitley, now Whitley Bay. Confusion of the two place names was very common and lead to the attachment of 'Bay' to Whitley for precisely this reason.

More is known about some of the women, particularly if they survived into the relative calm of the eighteenth century. Deborah Wardell was involved in the Society of Friends from her childhood. Born Deborah Walton in 1663, she was the daughter of John and Margaret Walton of Bishop Auckland who were convinced by George Fox "in the morning of the Day wherein truth was published"[368]. Deborah wrote many of the minutes of the Gateshead, Durham and Newcastle Women's Meetings and sent out an epistle from the Women's Yearly Meeting at York in 1694. She married Lancelot Wardell in 1683 and they had eleven children between 1684 and 1705. At least six of these children died in childhood. When Deborah herself died in 1732, a memorial epistle was written by her husband for the London Yearly Meeting:

A Testimony from the Monthly-meeting of Newcastle upon Tyne, concerning Deborah Wardell. [369]

There remains in our Hearts a Short Testimony to give for our dear Friend and Sister *Deborah Wardell* who died in the Seventieth Year of her Age. She was even like a shock of Full Ripe Corn, gathered in its due Season; and we doubt not but the Lord has received her Soul into the Mansions of Glory, where the Wicked cease form troubling, and the Faithful are at Rest.
Her Ministry was very lively; she was sound in Word and Doctrine, and very edifying; preaching the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in his Spiritual Appearance; frequently opening the Scriptures, and the Mysteries of Life and Salvation; with fervent Exhortations to serve the Lord in Righteousness and true Holiness.
Her Christianity did shew itself greatly by her meek and pleasing Spirit. She was many times fervent in Prayer to the Lord, for the rising Generation, *that they may come up in the Places of the Faithful who are gone before.*

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[368] Dictionary of Friends, Friends House, London.
[369] Collection of Testimonies concerning Several Ministers of the Gospel Amongst the People called *Quakers Deseased, with some of their last Expressions and Exhortation. Volume I.* (London: Luke Hinde, 1760) p. 62.

In the time of her last illnes, which continued above three Months, She oftentimes was in a very Sweet Frame of Mind, and frequently used to say, *The Thoughts of Death were no Terror to her*; but was entirely resigned to the Will of the Lord; and often expressed the Hope she had in her latter End.
Two Days before she died, having a very sick fit, upon her being a little recovered of it, she desired to see her Children, and expressed herself to them after this manner:-
I did not think I should have been alive till now. I hope it will be an happy Hour for me. I pray God bless you in all your Undertakings, and that he may be with you, as he has been with me, to the End of your Days.

Even allowing for the fact that this was a posthumous tribute, Deborah Wardell would seem to epitomise Quaker ideals and values. Her attitude to her religion and duty to her god and family were exemplary. Deborah's life may appear perfectly ordinary, but her day to day activities must have been full of trials and difficulties. She came from Bishop Auckland where Anne Audland was imprisoned for her faith:

> she continued preaching to the people from the window of the jail, declaring the truths of the gospel, and inculcating the necessity of being seriously engaged for the welfare of the immortal soul[370].

An awareness of this event, combined with the enthusiasm of her parents led to Deborah being involved in Quaker activities from an early age; she was only seventeen in 1680 when she was present at the Durham Women's Quarterly Meeting, and by 1683, aged 20 years, she was recording the minutes. She continued to be very involved in Friends' activities even though she gave birth to twelve children in nineteen years.

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[370] York Tracts no.16, quoted in Matthew Richley, History and Characteristics of Bishop Auckland, (Bishop Auckland: W.J. Cummins, 1872) p.145.

In 1690 Deborah presented a letter to the Durham Women's Quarterly meeting. To attend the meetings she would have had to travel at least 12 miles from Sunderland to Durham at a time when she had three children under the age of six and had buried her two month old daughter, Deborah, in the preceding August. The practical implications of organising and attending regular meetings, helping to run a business (her husband was a merchant) as well as bearing and raising children at almost yearly intervals are immense. There is no evidence to suggest that Deborah Wardell was ever imprisoned for her faith. As her husband 'was acquainted with and esteemed by the principal persons of these parts, including several of the legislature'[371] it may be that this protected them from persecution to a certain extent. However, she would have been involved in assisting those whose family members were absent due to persecution and imprisonment.

The practical difficulties of developing and maintaining effective networks and functioning as part of a national movement would seem to relate to time, distance and the effect of opposition. Figure 9 shows a chart of a sample of the Quaker women whose names appeared in the documentation of more than one meeting in the period 1679-1699.

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[371] Testimony of Durham Quarterly Meeting, Testimonies Concerning Several Ministers of the Gospel Amongst the People Called Quakers Deceased, Vol. I, (London: Luke Hinde, 1760) p.146.

Figure 7: Links between women attending Quaker Meetings

Name	First Minute 1679	Qtly Meeting, Durham 1680	Qtly Meeting Durham 1681	Qtly Meeting Durham 1682	Monthly Meeting Wall-nook 1682	Certifi-cate of removal 1687	Yearly Meeting York 1694	Monthly Meeting Gates-head 1694-99	Monthly Meeting Raby 1693
Rebekah Avery						*		*	
Ann Carnath	*			*		*			
Sarah Fisher		*						*	
Elinor Grainger younger			*						*
Elinor Grainger Elder			*						*
Elizabeth Hopper Durham		*			*				
Sarah Hunter	*			*		*		*	
Sarah Kirkby			*						*
Joan Linton	*	*		*		*		*	
Margret Spendey			*						*
Mary Tonstall		*	*						*
Margaret Trotter			*			*			*
Jane Turner	*			*					
Jane Vickers		*	*						*
Deborah Walton		*					*	*	

The women named above appeared in the following documents, as indicated:

The First Minute, Women's Quarterly Meeting, Durham 1679.
Minutes from Women's Quarterly Meeting, Durham, 1680.
Minutes from Women's Quarterly Meeting, Durham 1681.
Minutes from Women's Quarterly Meeting, Durham 1682.
Minutes from Women's Monthly Meeting, Walnook, 1682.
The Certificate for Removal of John and Sarah Tizacke, issued by the Monthly Meeting at Gateshead 1687.
Epistle from the Yearly Meeting at York 1694.
Minutes from Women's Monthly Meetings, Gatehead 1694-99.
Minutes from Women's Monthly Meeting, Raby 1693.

It can be seen from this chart that the women did not all attend the same meetings. It might be suggested that because of the erratic nature of women's attendance at these meetings, the women's meetings could not be viewed as an effective network. Of the nine meetings considered here, the most any woman attended was five (Joan Linton). However, between themselves these women were able to attend all nine meetings, thus providing an information and support network across the region.

For example, Mary Tonstall attended the Women's Quarterly Meeting at Durham in 1680 with Sarah Fisher, Elizabeth Hopper, Joan Linton, Jane Vickers and Deborah Walton. She also attended the Women's Quarterly Meeting at Durham in 1681 and the Women's Monthly Meeting at Raby in1693. Mary Tonstall and Jane Vickers were present with Margaret Trotter at the Women's Monthly Meeting at Raby. Sarah Fisher attended the Women's Monthly Meetings

in Gateshead, Elizabeth Hopper was present at the meeting in Wallnook and Jane Vickers also went to the 1681 Women's Quarterly Meeting at Durham. Deborah Walters attended the Yearly Meeting at York and the Monthly Meetings at Gateshead. Joan Linton was one of the founders at the First Women's Meeting at Durham in 1679 and was able to be present at four subsequent meetings. During the fifteen years covered by this information, this group of women had input into all nine meetings. The existence of reports sent from one meeting to another and the relative uniformity of the meetings would suggest fairly effective communication. The distances travelled to attend the meetings would indicate real commitment to the aims and ideology of their organisation.

The Aims and Objectives of the Women's Meetings in North-east England

The separation of the women's meetings from the general business meetings of the Society of Friends meant that their purpose and activities were discussed and formalised in an active way and did not merely evolve over time. It is likely that the women were already fulfilling these objectives as part of their role in the organisation, but the setting up of the women's meetings gave rise to documents which explained the specific duties of women. The aims of the women's meetings were clearly set out in the

minutes from the Women's Quarterly Meeting at Durham, 1680[372]. A total of eight proposals were declared:

The education of children, 'restraining them from evil company and from the Vanities, Snares and Temptations that are in the world'.

1. To prevent children and servants from 'running into the world for husbands or wifes'.
2. The older women would encourage the younger 'to all sobriety in apparrell'.
3. Any women who strayed from their religion would be 'admonished and reproved in the spirit of the meetings...that they may be brought into the way again'.
4. The women would meet regularly and 'whisperers & backbiters & talkers stopt'.
5. They would present testimonies against tithes.
6. The members would 'take special care of the poor, & all those that stand in need'.
7. In each locality the women would 'stand against the needless customs & superfluous fashions, that are in the world, in relation to marriages, births and burials.

There is nothing in this list that stands out as different to the general aims of the Society of Friends. However, the women would seem to be promoting themselves as guardians of morality and protectors of their members from the 'Temptations that are in the world'. Only item 6 indicated that the women would be responsible for a particular

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[372] *WQM at Durham 4th 11th Month 1680, ass. 840/ 5 T&W.*

activity, that of presenting testimonies against tithes. They did address the specific aims of the women's meetings in the documentation of their work. The women took their responsibilities very seriously and laid them out carefully in the minutes of their meetings: 'to Instruct; advise; admonish and incourage and build up one another in the most Holy faith'[373].

The style of the documents from the Durham Women's Meetings was very structured, taking the form of an address to all members. It began with the date and a statement of general intent, before moving on to lay out the specific aims of the meetings and discuss other business. The minutes of the meetings referred to more than one occasion, often looking forward to 'every respective meeting', thereby promoting the idea of a continuance of activities in an ordered and orderly society.

The formal layout of the documents was also echoed in the writings of other Women's Meetings, such as those at York,[374] and can be interpreted as intending to give authority to the group. The numbering of each aim gave the impression of reasoned, logical thought with each point following the other in a rational manner. They aimed to present a group who were united in their beliefs and objectives, realising that divisions would become ammunition for their enemies, both inside and outside of the Society of Friends, therefore:

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[373] WQM at Durham, 4th 11th Month 1680, ass.840/ 5 T&W.
[374] 'Epistle from the Women's Yearly Meeting at York (1688)', in C. Otten, English Women's Voices, (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1992) p.379.

> The elder women [shall] exhort the younger to all sobriety and modesty in apparrell....make a narrow search & inspection that all those of our sex who profess truth & comes amongst us & are looked upon as of us do walk as becomes the gospel of our lord Jesus Christ[375].

They identified the necessity of remaining a cohesive unit and the need to 'unify one with another' was a theme running through the minutes.

The use of historical and biblical heroines for inspiration helped to give the impression that they were following a tradition of godly women and were part of a divinely ordained pattern: 'that our good works may follow us as Dorcas, who was a disciple, which when she was dead was commended for her good works and Alms deeds.'[376] Chapter 6 will discuss the citation of virtuous predecessors by women at this time. The writings of Quaker women continued this tradition by using the examples of biblical women to question attitudes towards women. Dorcas was a New Testament figure 'full of good works and almsdeeds'[377]. When she died, 'all the widows stood by [Peter] weeping, shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made when she was with them'[347]. Peter brought Dorcas back from the dead and reunited her with her companions. The story of an ordinary pious woman, who was saved by a saint because of her good works alongside other women would appear to be one that Quaker women

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[375] WQM at Durham, 4th 11th Month 1680, ass. 840/ 5 T&W.
[376] WQM at Durham, 4th 11th Month 1680, ass. 840/ 5 T&W.
[377] The Bible: Authorized King James Version With Apocrypha, (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1997) New Testament, p.160.

could identify with. Exemplary figures such as Dorcas, and also Susanna,[378] were cited to provide models of piety and chastity and ideas about what it was possible for women to achieve. The women of the Society of Friends also reinterpreted the story of Adam and Eve, emphasising God's intentions and the equality of their relationship in the Garden of Eden:

> for which end woman was made in the beginning, and God gave her to the man, to be a meet help, and they were in labour together in the Covenant of god, In the State of Innocency, in which they were made and Created, in holyness and Purity, but when the Serpant got in upon them & became Prevalent over them then the man was to rule over the woman, because she was first in transgression, and in that spirit is the ruling & Lordship & usurpation, which is out of the truth, & for judgement & we being made Partakers & witnesses in measure of the restoring power and saving health of Jesus which redeems & regenerates & brings man & woman up to God again into that Holy station & state of innocency in which they were in the beginning[379].

In this analysis, men and women were created to work together and accepting Jesus was thought to restore them to their pre-lapsarian state.

One of the ways that women could win power and value was by stressing their differences from men. If they accepted the cultural definition of womanhood by taking on the symbols and expectations associated with it, they could then induce men into compliance, or establish a society for themselves which

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[378] The History of Susanna was an addition to the Book of Daniel contained in the Apocrypha. Susanna refused the approaches of the Elders, who then denounced her as unchaste. Her eventual triumph over them followed a plea to God and the assistance of Daniel. R. Carroll and S. Prickett, editors, The Bible: Authorized King James Version With Apocrypha, Notes p.394.
[379] WQM at Durham The 4th Day of the 11th Month 1680, Ass no. 840/5 T&W.

functioned to their own rules and agenda[380]. Many early modern women assimilated the idea that women were inherently virtuous. Quaker women accepted the prevailing view of society that women should be chaste and pious, as it fitted well with their beliefs. Once they were given their own space within their society, where they would be away from the temptations and corruption of the masculine world, they attempted to create a suitable environment in which they could develop their virtue effectively. The women's meetings were used by their members as a way in which women could define a part of their society by developing a public world of their own.

> although we be the weaker vessels, yet there are many concerns Proper forms, wherein the honour of truth is concerned if we are capable to bear a Testimony for the Lord, in our generation, being Mothers of our Children, & Governors of Famillies,. you see that there are many particular things which relates to our place & duty, forces us to look unto, so that we find a necessity upon us according to the Holy Apostles Exhortation, that the Elder Women Exhort the Younger, & admonish them that they walk in all circumspection & godly fear[381].

The women did not challenge the idea of themselves as the 'weaker vessel' as in some ways this was a benefit - the weaker vessel was more easily used by God. They recognised that there were areas of activity that they could claim as their own and they accepted the allocation of their work in this way.

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[380] *Rosaldo p. 36.*
[381] WQM at Durham The 4th Day of the 11th Month 1680, T&W Ass no. 840/5.

The women's meetings were prepared to accept the prospect of some of their members failing, possibly because of the popular image of women as weak and easily led. However, to minimise discord they were willing to reach out, rather than condemn. It is important to note that those who transgressed were not rejected:

> if any should be led aside by the temptations of the enemy in any way, we may endeavour to reclaim such, & all things as tend to division amongst us, may be stopt, & follow those things which makes for peace and Reconciliation[382].

Although one of the functions of the meetings was to discipline errant members, an ethos of conciliation ran throughout the minutes of the meetings. The support for the members of the group did not end if they were shown to be weak therefore it actually increased so that they could be helped back into "truth", preventing alienation and subsequent loss of members.

In 1688 the Durham Quarterly Meeting members were asked to speak to Jane Hall 'conserning her and yt young man'[383]. The following meeting noted that Jane Hall was present:

> severall friends spoke to her as it was with ym in ye love of god tenderly advising her to quitt herself of ye young man he not being a friend[384].

It does appear however, that the only weapon used to persuade her to conform was peer pressure, as it is recorded that 'she seemed not att all to receive our

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[382] WQM at Durham, 4th 11th Month 1680, ass. 840/ 5 T&W.
[383] WQM Durham, 27th 11th Month 1688, microfilm, Darlington Public Library.
[384] WQM Durham, 26th 4th Month 1688, microfilm, DPL.

advise but desired to be lett alone'. Chapter 2 has discussed the relationship between social support and social pressure[385]. It would appear that in this case pressure was brought to bear to encourage compliance. There is no further mention of Jane Hall, so it must be assumed that having failed in their persuasion, the women did as she requested. The disciplinary aspect of the Women's Meetings seems to have been particularly gentle, geared towards expression of the ideal with a desire that the members should attempt to come as near to that ideal as possible.

The women saw their role as an active one which would have an effect on the morality and behaviour of the community. The special role of mothers in educating their children was a primary concern. The instruction of children was seen as a way in which:

> the evil seed may be crushed; and the corrupt and vain desires may be crucified and slain in the beginning...and the good seed and tender principle cherished'[386].

George Fox's initial reasoning in supporting the creation of the women's meetings was for them to take the traditional role of visiting the sick, poor, widows and orphans[387] which was certainly a role adopted by the north-east women. However, in the aims of the women's meetings there is no mention of a

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[385] Chapter 2, p. 56.
[386] *WQM at Durham, 4th 11th Month 1680*, ass. 840/ 5 T&W.
[387] Kunze, p.155.

woman's duty to her husband. This is surprising given prevailing social attitudes regarding a woman's subservience to her husband.

The fact that Quaker women were expected to put God before their husband had the potential to create serious disruption to the family which was seen as the basic unit of an orderly society. Elizabeth Ashbridge defied her husband by attending meetings, justifying her actions by writing: 'tho' he was near and I loved him as a wife ought, yet God was nearer than all the world to me'[388]. In her case, duty to God conflicted with her husband's idea of her role in their marriage, causing her to refuse his command to stay at home. This situation would also have had further implications for the husband as the respect of his peers often rested on his ability to control his wife. Public disobedience from her was a threat to his authority which could cause the man to be ridiculed and his authority in other areas affected.

In the eighteenth century, the restriction of economic and social opportunity for many women resulted in a greater concentration on the role of the wife. This might be expected to be shown as a change in the aims of the women's meetings. However, the Yearly Meeting in London, 1755, reiterated the

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[388] Elizabeth Ashbridge, Quaker Grey. Some Account of the Forepart of the life of Elizabeth Ashbridge, (London: The Astolot Press, 1904) p.62-63. For discussion of Quakers and marriage, see P.W. Bartlett, 'Sexual Equality and Conjugal Harmony: The Way to Celestial Bliss. A View of Early Quaker Matrimony.', Journal of the Friends' Historical Society Volume 55 (6) 1988.

aims of the earlier meetings and again omitted any mention of wifely duty[389]. It is possible that the wifely role was perceived as so obvious that it did not warrant further explanation, but the same could be said for the correct upbringing of children. The absence of any reference to marriage could be evidence of the desire of the women to be seen as distinct from their marital obligations. Although practice may have differed to a certain extent, the subjugation of women by law at this time was almost complete and it would seem that Quaker women set up their meetings in way that opposed this idea. Their emphasis on peer monitoring of behaviour and dress, support and disciplining of those who weakened and collection of money for the use of the group, effectively negated the influence of external male authority. Unlike most other social structures, they did not have a rigid hierarchy with authority designated by virtue of class or gender, but relied instead on the wisdom and experience of the older members to guide the younger.

Quaker Women, Writing and Authority

Most women's writing at this time contained elements which pre-empted expected criticism. In fictional writing, this tended to be a preface which apologised for its existence:

> I dare not venture to send this play barefaced into the world, without saying something in its defence....'tis the error of a weak woman's pen,

[389] Women's Yearly Meeting, London, 1755. Extracts from Yearly Meetings 1675-1829 MF210 T&W.

> one altogether ignorant of any, but her mother's tongue, and very far from being a perfect mistress of that too[390]

In this case, the author 'Ariadne' went on to say that 'these reasons which should have dissuaded me, could not conquer the inclinations I had for scribbling since childhood'. The evidence would suggest that she feared criticism for writing, hence the apology and the use of a pseudonym. However, she felt sufficiently confident in her writing to overcome this and publish anyway. It is important to be aware of the conventions within women's writing at this time when approaching Quaker women's texts as their writing can appear to contradict their actions[391].

In many ways, the documents of the women's meetings followed the pattern of female writing at this time. In early modern society, to be a woman writing and speaking of her own volition, independently of men, was unacceptable and women lacked the authority which male writers accepted as their right. In the minutes of the Durham Women's Monthly Meetings, women's voices were presented in both a positive and a negative way. They were 'talkers and professors of the truth'[392], a necessary role for all Quakers to whom evidence of commitment to God must be active and visible. However, the women also warned against 'whisperers & backbiters & talkers' whose chatter created 'work and business for [them] all that none need be idle in God's vineyard.' The

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[390] 'Ariadne', She Ventures and He Wins (1695), P. Lyons and F. Morgan, editors, Female Playwrights of the Restoration, (London: Everyman, 1991) p.105.

Quaker women seemed to recognise that their voices could be used for good, but this would only be accepted by the rest of their society if the female reputation for using words in a destructive way could be countered.

There were no apologies from the writers in the minutes of the women's meetings, although their documents appeared to expect condemnation of their separate meetings. The tone of the documents was at times defensive, turning to their beliefs to give authority to their actions:

> we found it our duty and concern for the truth's sake as a necessity was on our spirits....we find a necessity upon us according to the Holy Apostles Exhortation[393].

They presented the Women's meetings as essential, with their members following the will of the Lord. If they had claimed their meetings were inspired by a person, or to fulfil a need identified by themselves, the women risked open condemnation for their rejection of the patriarchal system. The women therefore looked to God to give authority to their actions.

They appeared to accept their socially prescribed position, 'although we be the weaker vessels'[394], but this also allowed them increased power as the 'weaker vessels'

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[391] See also Chapter 6.
[392] WQM at Durham 4th 11th Month 1680, ass. 840/ 5 T&W.
[393] WQM at Durham, 4th 11th Month 1680, Ass. no.840/5, T&W.
[394] WQM at Durham, 4th 11th Month 1680, Ass. no.840/5, T&W.

were more easily used as the tools of God, 'led and guided by the spirit of the truth'[395]. They took their authority directly from God therefore giving their words emphasis and power. The attention given to the subject of authority must also indicate that the documents were written for more than a purely female audience. The women seemed to feel the need to justify their place both within the Society of Friends and in wider society. If the minutes of the women's meetings were merely intended as a record for the group alone this would be unnecessary, therefore it must be assumed that the women were intending to circulate and publish their writings.

The Functions of the Women's Meetings

The minutes of the Women's Monthly Meetings detailed what they actually did and how the members worked together. The majority of the minutes of the Women's Monthly Meetings in the north-east of England are taken up with the clearance of marriages. Young people were encouraged to marry within the Society of Friends to prevent a loss of members and the Durham Monthly Meeting lists as one of its aims: 'to prevent our Children, and servants from

[395]This argument is explored further in M. A. Schofield, 'Women's Speaking Justified: The *Feminine Quaker Voice 1662-1797*', Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature *no. 6 Spring 1987*, pp.61-77, and S. Wiseman, 'Unsilent Instruments and the Devil's Cushions: Authority in *Seventeenth Century Women's Prophetic Discourse*', *in* I. Armstrong, New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts, (London: Routledge, 1992).

running into the world for husbands, or wifes'[396]. It was important to Quakers that their marriages were public events, therefore they were advised that marriage proposals should be announced at two separate meetings and the certificate signed by at least twelve mature witnesses[397]. The couple would each attend their own meeting to state their intentions, then that meeting would ask two friends to check that there were no impediments to the marriage:

> Att our Women's Meeting att Gateside ye 10th day of ye 10th Mo- 1694 Arthur Dixinson of – acquainted this Meeting with his intentions of Marriage with Joannor Trewhitt of Sunderland to wch she likewise gave her consent. Deborah Wardell and Rachel Maude are appointed to Make enquiry conserning viz and to give an account at ye next Monthly Meeting.[398]

Quaker marriages were generally overseen with a rigor and stringency that contrasted with that of their Anglican counterparts:

> Conduct which seemed disreputable to the local meeting, such as swearing oaths, associating with 'separate spirits', indebrtedness, or failing to speak in the manner approved of by the society, was sufficient to postpone or cancel a marriage proposal.[399]

Although it has been suggested that there was strong resistance to the authority of women over one of the most important aspects of family life[400], this would seem to have been only from certain factions within the movement. There is no

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[396] WQM at Durham 4th 11th Month 1680, Ass. no.840/5, T&W.
[397] C. Trevett, Women and Quakerism in the Seventeenth Century, (London: William Sessions, 1991) p. 88.
[398] Women's Monthly Meeting at Gateside, 10th Month 1694, MF 181, T&W.
[399] A. Davies, The Quakers in English Society 1655-1725, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 97.

evidence to suggest any discord on this issue in the north-eastern records, with the men's meetings requesting that enquiries were made by the Women's Meeting:

> Our men's friends desiring us women to make Inquirrey concerning Frances Herrison Clearness in way of marriage'[401].

The system seemed to work fairly harmoniously, or if there was any discord it was not recorded in any way.

Differences in the role of the Quarterly Women's Meetings appear to have been minimal. They dealt with discipline, as already discussed, and they also collected and distributed money. 1684 a request was made that collections should be brought to the next Durham Quarterly Women's Meeting. A total of £3 50s 10d was gathered by the women and distributed to those in need. The beneficiaries included 'a travelling woman who was kept prisoner at Durham for several weeks on truth's account'; 'friends in ye prison house off correction'; 'Alice Turbitt who was then out of health'; 'Widdow Fenick'; 'a poor boy of Sunderland meeting', and others in similar situations[402]. The Men's meetings also donated money to the Women's Meetings: £1 2s was given to the Gateshead Women's Monthly Meeting in 1692, which was then given to those the women agreed were needy. In the 1690s the Gateshead Women's Meeting

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[400] Kunze, p.156.
[401] *Women's Monthly Meeting, Gateside, 11th 12th Month 1694*, MF181, T&W.
[402] WQM at Durham, 30th 7th Month 1684, DPL.

regularly supported at least three women, Elinor Jackson, Jane Wear and Mary Reid, two of whom had been signatories on previous documents from the Women's Meetings. Careful records were kept in the minute books of money given to the meetings, how it was spent, and how much was left "resting"[403].

The minutes of the Women's Quarterly Meetings detailed the lack of work specific to the meetings. The minutes of Quarterly Meeting at Durham in 1685 related that there was nothing of note to report and adjourned the meeting. It may have been simply that the business was already dealt with before it reached the Quarterly Meetings, or perhaps in their enthusiasm for organisation, the Society of Friends had provided structures where none were really necessary.

The support of other members was immensely important, however. State persecution until the Toleration Act (1689) meant that the Quaker community must have been well organised and resourceful if its members and their families were to survive. The Conventicle Acts of 1664 and 1670 fined those dissenters who met to worship illegally in groups of five or more. Significant fines were levied on those prosecuted and informers could claim a third of any fines imposed[404]. The Minutes of the women's meetings record that:

> the Justices so called with the Officers came to our meeting & caused all the women friends to be hailed out & so broke our meeting & committed

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[403] Women's Monthly Meeting at Gateshead, 1692, MF181 T&W.
[404] Davies, p. 171-2.

> all the men friends excepting one or two to prison for being at the said meeting[405].

The ability of the state to imprison significant numbers of Quakers must have meant that families were left without adult members and their associated earning power. In the above case it was only men who were arrested, but this would have meant that the women would have to take over their work and duties and also petition for their release. In an earlier incident a number of Quakers were arrested and imprisoned in Tynemouth Castle:

> John Blakely of Drawell near Sedburg in Yorkshire, Yeoman ....; Mary Dove jun of the same, Spinster; William Truthwaite of Bowden; Robert Linton, Thomas Chandler, Thomas Merriman, Lancelot Wardell Merchant, Thomas Smith, Labourer, Richard Wilson and Margaret his wife, George Carr, Salt Merchant, Sarah Knowles, Dorothy Dawson, Joane Sanderson, Spinsters, William Maude Merchant, George Linton, John Harrison all of Sunderland or Shields, Susanna Truthwaite Spinster, and Laurence Heslam of Whitby in Yorkshire, Mariner, were all taken at a Meeting at Robert Lintins in South Shields by Major Graham, then Deputy -Governor of Tinmouth Castle, and cast into nasty holes there, where they lay a full month, and then he turned them out, having so far as appeared to them, neither Order, Authority, nor Warrant for any Part of his Proceeding.[406]

In this raid most of the prominent Quaker families of the area had at least one member taken into custody and the impact of this on the community must have been immense.

Families and businesses would have had to be maintained, funds raised to feed those in prison and petitions filed for their release. The responsibility would have

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[405] *WQM, Durham, 27th 1st Month 1683, Ass 840/1T&W.*

fallen on those still free although the threat of imprisonment would have been hanging over them. The Quakers were certainly heavily persecuted as a group at this time as the lists of "sufferings" show very clearly. Records for Northumberland and Durham between 1660 and 1688 detail 950 prosecutions and six people dying in prison[407]. They were particularly heavily persecuted in the early 1680s. Women did not stand back from taking their share of persecution, but men were more often imprisoned as they were deemed to be the responsible members of the household. It therefore fell on the women to support each other and organise help by using their networks to maintain families and meetings.

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[406] Besse, p.174.
[407] C. Horle, The Quakers and the English Legal System, (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1988)p.282.

Plate 4: Tynemouth Castle
(Photograph: Paula Baxter)

Kunze suggests that persecution increased the feeling of solidarity within the Society of Friends and strengthened group survival[408]. If this is the case, then it surely must follow that as the women were doubly discriminated against as both an oppressed gender and a religious minority, their feelings of unity and reliance upon each other will also have been highlighted 'although the wrath of men be increased against [them]'[409].

Their links with other women were very strong and provided the basis of a powerful support network. However, the place of the women's meetings in this network is less important than might first have been thought. The women in the north-east needed encouragement to create a formal organisation separate from the main business meetings and there was often not enough work allocated to them in this way to keep them as busy as they wished to be. This does not suggest that they did not value their meetings, rather that the organisation and formality of them was not always seen as necessary. Strong networks existed before the development of the women's meetings, but it would appear that they fulfilled a need within and outside the Society of Friends to have a clearly defined place and role for women.

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[408] Kunze, p.155.
[409] *WQM at Durham, Two Minutes,*.

Conclusion

The widely accepted view of the Society of Friends women's meetings is that they were an outward sign of the Quaker commitment to equality between all people, regardless of class or gender. The alternative angle is that the women gained nothing from the development of separate meetings as they were effectively marginalised by meeting separately and forced out to a position where they lost the authority which they had initially gained by their participation in the general meetings. It would appear that both of these views are largely inaccurate because although the women's meetings had a certain amount of power, their separation from the main business meetings gave them less influence.

The main reason for the existence of the women's meetings was to appease the rest of society, reduce persecution and aid the acceptance of the Society of Friends. The women's meetings presented a challenge to their society in many ways. The formation of an organisation without a male figurehead was a threat to a society based on patriarchal ideals. The assertion of the female right to public speech and independent action by religiously motivated women questioned the premise that women's language and sexuality were inseparable. It was difficult to criticise women who claimed they were God's direct agents and

followed a pious lifestyle. Their style of writing did not directly oppose ideas of conventional femininity, but restated their ideals while using their actions to promote a positive female image. The persecution of Quakers in the seventeenth century is undeniably the result of their position as 'the other', operating outside mainstream society. In many ways it was this 'otherness' that attracted the women, who were already officially and legally marginalised. Within the meetings, women were able to gain the strength from their common beliefs and from each other to challenge accepted ideas of their role and place within society. In many cases, Quaker women were able to negotiate within marriage to gain a measure of autonomy and self-expression. By clearly stating their aims and priorities they were able to create a stage for themselves which questioned the negative images around them. Their faith and solidarity gave them the strength to endure the trials and hardships which littered their lives. The organisational structures set up in the 1680s reduced the influence of any one group within the movement and disseminated power throughout the various meetings. Women continued to attend and contribute to the general meetings and their steadfastness in the face of persecution and adversity went a long way to ensuring the Society of Friends continued to flourish into the eighteenth century.

Chapter 6
"'Tis Women's Duty Women to Protect"[410] - Ideas about Female Networks and Communities

Throughout the seventeenth century a number of women wrote texts which explored ideas about female networks and communities. These texts were varied in their genre, subject matter and approach, but their presentation of women's networks and communities provides a link between them. Chapter 2 has discussed the idea that, in a society where they were isolated and forced into the domestic sphere, women could challenge men's authority and raise their status by creating a space where they prevailed[411]. One of the safest ways of doing this would appear to be the creation of a fictional or literary model. In this way, the benefits and problems could be explored, with minimal risk to any particular woman, as the whole scenario remained unreal and therefore less threatening to the status quo. The expression of women's imagined communities can reveal a great deal about their ideals and also the way in which they saw society working, either against them or in their favour.

The preceding chapters have examined women's networks which attempted to do this in practice, the barriers to their activities and the extent to

[410] Mary Davys, 'The Northern Heiress' editor, D. H. Stephanson, The Works of Mary Davys: A Critical Edition, (University of Iowa, PhD., 1971) p. 57.

which they were successful in creating networks which could flourish in early modern society. This chapter will look at texts which included ideas about women's networks and communities. It will explore the ideas, themes and continuities in the writing of female authors, particularly those with strong links to northern England such as Mary Astell and Mary Davys.

It has been suggested that women could gain power and a sense of value when they were able to transcend domestic limits, either by entering men's world, or by creating a society for themselves[412]. In pre-industrial society, men held the authority and legitimate right to make decisions within their domestic and social groups. Approved goals for women were defined by their place in the family power structure and by their family's position in society as a whole. Women's power was unofficial and subject to negotiation by the use of their influence and the trade of services. It is perhaps unsurprising therefore, that in an atmosphere of conflict and oppression, women should plan for alternative societies.

It could be argued that although women's networks existed, they happened purely by chance and women were not aware of them, therefore they could not be 'used' in a meaningful way. However, this chapter will suggest that by creating texts which included female networks these writers were theorising

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[411] Chapter 2 p. 36-37.
[412] Rosaldo, p.41. This is discussed further in this chapter 2, p.37.

about the existence and uses of these networks. The existence of women's writing which imagined, depicted and promoted female networks and communities would indicate knowledge of the possibilities that such structures offered.

Mary Davys' writing included many examples of women's networks which she drew partly from her own experiences. In the preface to 'The Merry Wanderer', she stated that she was experimenting to see if 'it was not possible to divert the town with real events, just as they happened'[413]. The deliberate creation of scenario containing women's networks would suggest a consciousness of the existence and power of organised female structures and their place in society.

From medieval times women's writing has explored the personal, social and political advantages of collective and collaborative networks and the dangers inherent in using them. In fifteenth century France, Christine de Pisan laid out her ideas for a 'City of Ladies' to act as a haven for all the virtuous ladies of the time who were under attack from misogynistic male writers. The 'Book of the City of Ladies' (1404) was written as her statement on the issues that had been raised in the controversy over the 'Romance of the Rose'. Virtuous ladies were used as the 'building blocks' of de Pisan's imagined City and their exemplary lives provided evidence to refute the ideas of male writers that all

women were weak and ignorant[414]. The 'City of Ladies' was a refuge from the unpleasantness of men, but also an illustration of the strength of women. Christine de Pisan advised women to rely on their own actual experience, rather than take notice of male writers who could not know about the qualities and skills of women from their reading.

Following on from the idea of retreat, de Pisan wrote a treatise which gave advice on how to survive in the real world. The 'Treasure of the City of Ladies' was a guide for women in the practicalities of living in the society of fifteenth century France, complete with ideas about how to survive oppression and overcome barriers to their activities. This acknowledged the fact that women were likely to be operating mainly within informal structures and were therefore likely to need to use methods which circumvented official pathways. It addressed women throughout the different layers of society and at varying stages of their life cycle, recognising the variation in their circumstances and the implication of this for their position.

One of de Pisan's recurring themes was that women should support each other and work together for their common good: 'the ladies of the court ought to be models of all good things and all honour to other women'[415]. Women were

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[413] Davys, *'The Merry Wanderer'*, in Stephanson, The Works of Mary Davys, p. 125.
[414] Christine de Pisan, The Treasure of the City of Ladies, Introduction by S. Lawson, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) p. 21.
[415] de Pisan, p. 75.

expected to present a good example to others and not bring disgrace onto their sex with inappropriate behaviour. However, she accepted that there were situations in which women were unable to function effectively: 'there are many who...have bad-tempered husbands who keep them on such a tight rein that they hardly dare speak...this precept cannot apply to them'[384]. The utopian 'City of Ladies' was accepted by its author to be impractical, but it was an example of what female governance could achieve. Its sequel gave women the tools to help them function in the real world without resorting to deceit and intrigue against their own sex.

It is perhaps surprising, given de Pisan's reputation as a politically conservative writer[416], that these texts indicate a consciousness of the power of women's collective action. In the introduction of 'The Treasure of the City of Ladies', de Pisan related how she was persuaded to write a second book by the 'three ladies of virtue' (Reason, Rectitude and Justice)[417]. Her aim was to educate 'all the feminine college and their devout community'. She was fully aware of the dangers of isolation for women and advocated a collaborative

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[416] The attempt by many critics to identify the 'first feminist' has resulted in a condemnation of *many women writers as purely reactionary, ie., writing only to defend women from attacks, rather* than advancing arguments which discussed the cause of equality. J. Kelly, 'Early Feminist *Theory and the Querelle des Femmes' explored this issue with respect to late medieval women* writers, in J. Kelly, Women, History and Theory, (London: University of Chicago Press, 1984) pp.65-109.

[417] de Pisan, p.31.

approach to the challenges of living in an environment which was so hostile for the vast majority of women.

Rosaldo has suggested that in domestic groups where men held the authority and had the legitimate right to make decisions about others, women may have held unassigned power, that is, a means of obtaining compliance with their actions through trade or withholding of services[418]. Their currency differed depending on the circumstances, but they generally fitted into the informal system[419]. Women's strategies were a response to the distribution of power and authority and they differed depending on whether the significant decisions affecting their lives were made by men. Influence was one of the most important forms of persuasion. Influence could be exercised by appealing to one particular norm - for example, a particular action might be in the man's own interests, or that of his children.

In the early years of the seventeenth century, Queen Anne of England, the wife of James I, provided a clear example of the way in which influence could be used to get what she wanted. In 1603, when James I ascended to the English throne, Queen Anne refused to go to England until her son was returned to her care. James I had removed Prince Henry from his mother when he was an infant and given him to a Scottish nobleman to bring up. Queen Anne used the lever of

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[418] Rosaldo, p.99.
[419] See discussion on informal systems, Chapter 2, p. 36-42.

James' embarrassment at her non-attendance at the English court to force him to return her son[420]. James was not only her husband, but also the monarch, so she was beholden to him on a number of different levels. Although she was obliged to follow the wishes of the King, Queen Anne used other methods of persuasion to get what she wanted. Women appear to have been aware of their rights and also of the ways in which they could gain further power. However, they were also conscious of the devious and underhand nature of this influence and the fact that they often had to use corruption in an effort to gain the rights that men held by law.

Elizabeth Cary's 'The Tragedy of Mariam'(1613) explored the effects of power games within a Royal court. In her drama, the women at the court of Herod were prey to factions and splits engendered by the monarch. At the beginning of the play the king was absent from the court. Herod had gone to Rome where he was rumoured to have been killed by Caesar. When Herod was thought to be dead, his wife, mother-in-law and sister attempted to co-operate, but on his return, they were again isolated and divided. Mariam was aware of her power over Herod: 'I know I could enchain him with a smile:/And lead him captive with a gentle word[421]. However, she chose not to use her influence and, aware that she had no support within the court, trusted that her innocence of any

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[420] Lewalski, p. 20.

wrongdoing would save her from the wrath of the king on his return: 'Mine innocence is hope enough for me'[422]. Mariam's lack of an effective support network, combined with her refusal to trade her compliance for her life, led to the tragedy at the heart of the drama.

Written during the reign of James I, the play can be seen as an indictment of a system which forced women to resort to manipulation and deceit to gain any sort of influence[423]. While her husband was at home, Mariam was effectively isolated, like the women identified by Christine de Pisan who, 'hardly dare speak, even to their servants and to people of their households'[424]. Unfortunately, Mariam was unable to 'obey in order to have peace' as De Pisan advised in her treatise. Her refusal to co-operate in power games with Herod, led directly to her death. The total lack of female networking in this text is very noticeable. Although there were a significant number of female characters, they conspired and plotted against each other to the detriment of all and their enmity can be seen as a warning about the dangers of female non-co-operation. This

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[421] Elizabeth Cary, The Tragedy of Mariam, ed. B. Weller and M.W. Ferguson, (London: University of California Press, 1994) p.111.
[422] Cary, p. 111.
[423] See also Chapter 3 for discussion of Lady Anne Clifford's dealings with King James and his court, p.78. Although there appears no direct evidence to suggest that Cary and Lady Anne Clifford met, they moved in similar social circles and both women were denied their legal inheritance by the actions of their father. For discussion of this issue relating to Cary, see Weller and Ferguson, p.8-9.
[424] de Pisan, p.80. The power of speech and its links to promiscuity has been explored by L. Gowing, 'Language, Power and the Law: Women's Slander Litigation in Early Modern London', in J. Kermode and G. Walker, Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England. M. Tebbutt,

play can be interpreted as a warning from Cary to her female readers (or audience[425]) that conforming to the male stereotypes of 'Women Beware Women' could lead to tragedy. In Cary's play there was a sense of a lost history as Mariam appeared adrift and isolated at the court. Perhaps Mariam was lacking the support of a woman who could be to her the 'second light' of Cary's dedication: 'You are my next belov'd, my second friend/....From you, my Phoebe, shines my second light.'[426]

Women writers exposed their use and knowledge of networks in a number of ways. The authors provided fictional accounts and stories containing networks, but they also used literary conventions and bibliographical structures to create and develop links with other women. The dedications and prefacing passages to women's writing were often very revealing because they showed the mechanisms by which the author hoped to gain support and patronage. Many writings in the early modern period were prefaced by lengthy dedications. These panegyrical verses had a number of functions. One of the reasons for dedicating

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Women's Talk has also examined women's the purpose of 'gossip' and women's use of language as power.

[425] There is no evidence that 'The Tragedy of Mariam' was ever performed and some critics argue that it was not written for public performance. Stephanie Hodgson-Wright (University of Sunderland) has argued strongly to refute this assertion (Renaissance Literature Seminar Series, University of Newcastle, 1998) and she has directed performances of a number of female-authored dramas as a way of exploring the texts and issues involved in their staging.

[426] Cary, 'To Diana's Earthly Deputess, and My Worthy Sister, Mistress Elizabeth Cary', The Tragedy of Mariam, p.66. The subject of this dedication is not known, but may have been a sister, or sister-in-law of the author (see Mariam p.151).

works was to raise funds for the author from female patrons. However, this would appear to be only part of the reason for writing such verse.

Cary's poem of dedication to her 'second light' appeared to express genuine feelings of care and love towards 'Phoebe'. Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* also had a number of dedications to women which differed at each edition. Beilin has suggested that creating images of beneficent female power justified women writers' own work. Presenting women who spoke and acted wisely gave authority to the words of female writers:

> by ransoming women's knowledge and speech from the suspicion of subversion and shrewishness, they could themselves attempt more as writers and gently woo an audience to read their works.[427]

Lanyer presented a picture of women throughout Christian times protecting and promoting Christianity. In her poetry she created a range of women from Eve to the Countess of Cumberland who represented the image of the true Christian woman and celebrated women at the heart of Christian doctrine[428]. The praise of virtuous women had generally been claimed by male authors who had developed their own conventions which focused mainly on the spirituality of the poet, rather than the woman herself. Beilin has discussed this idea with respect to Donne and Jonson, concluding that:

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[427] E. Beilin, Redeeming Eve, (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987) p.177.
[428] Beilin, *p. 181.*

> Whereas Donne and Jonson developed their images of virtuous women "as poets use," hoping to reveal a truth about human nature...Lanyer wrote specifically to praise women[429].

Lanyer's poetry exposed a desire for a different world, in which Christian ideals were manifest in women from the Daughters of Jerusalem through the ages to the Countess of Cumberland. God's will on Earth would be achieved through the agency of women whose example would inspire piety and goodness in others. However, it is clear that Lanyer recognised the difference between her utopian desires and the reality of her life.

In the final section of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum,* 'A Description of Cooke-ham', Lanyer expanded on the theme of virtuous women. 'A Description of Cooke-ham' was a lament about the loss of her ideal which left the author bereft of both patron and role. It described the pastoral idyll at Cooke-Ham which existed only to provide a suitable environment for the virtuous women staying there:

> The Trees with leaves, with fruits, with flowers clad,
> Embrac'd each other seeming to be glad,
> Turning themselves to beauteous Canopies,
> To shade the bright Sunne from your brighter eies[430].

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[429] Beilin, p. 179.
[430] Aemilia Lanyer, '*Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*', (1611) English Books, Reel 1855, H2 Lines 23-26.

This 'Farewell' ended the text of 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum' in a melancholy fashion, with the enforced abandonment of its author by the women who had inspired and supported her:

> Unconstant Fortune, thou art most to blame,
> Who cast us downe into so lowe a frame:
> Where our great friends we cannot dayly see,
> So great a difference is there in degree[431].

It would seem that the withdrawal of 'espows'd' Lady Anne Clifford and her mother, the Countess of Cumberland, from Cooke-ham back into the world, destroyed the pious female community which had come so close to Lanyer's ideal. The structure of the earlier part of the poem pointed towards the 'Description of Cooke-Ham'. Lanyer's descriptions of worthy women would seem to be an attempt to minimise the isolation she felt at the destruction of the female community at Cooke-Ham. Like Christine de Pisan, Lanyer suggested that women's spirituality and piety was allowed greater expression away from the world of men. By listing virtuous women throughout history she drew support from those who had gone before and placed herself and her 'friends' in their ranks. Lanyer revived those women in history who had achieved recognition of their activities and created a continuum where she and her contemporaries could take their place. The writing of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* wrote Lanyer into a

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[431] Lanyer, H 4 lines 8-11.

history of women and implied that there would be a future for such female communities.

In male authored texts of the same period, women were generally presented in two different ways. They were either isolated and solitary figures in the midst of a story centring around active male characters, or they conspired and plotted against each other. Shakespeare's tragic female characters, although varied, tended to be lone figures. Lady Macbeth functioned within the court of treacherous men. She was isolated from other women initially by her ambition for her husband and later in the play she was divorced from all reality by her madness. In 'Othello', Desdemona was rarely able to make her own voice heard and appeared to be present as the object of men's desires and fears, rather than a person in her own right. Her rights were disregarded, ignored and violated, with no one to speak for her. Even though a kinsman did visit and observe her ill-treatment by Othello, he did nothing to prevent her abuse and murder. Middleton incorporated his message about the dangers of women to each other into the title of his play *Women Beware Women*. In this drama, the women plotted, schemed and goaded each other into revenge:

> Livia [to Isabella]: Look at me wench!
> 'Twas I betray'd thy honour subtly to him
> Under a false tale[432].

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[432] T. Middleton, 'Women Beware Women' in Middleton, Five Plays, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988) Act 4 scene 2, lines 72-74 p. 327.

The destruction and chaos that was created throughout the play was laid firmly at the door of the women and was also owned by the female characters. In the closing scene Bianca summed up the events as follows:

> O the deadly snares
> That women set for women, without pity
> Either to soul or honour! Learn by me
> To know your foes. In this belief I die:
> Like our own sex, we have no enemy, no enemy![433]

Whilst it made for a dramatic storyline, such a vilification of women by a woman, perpetuated the myth that women could not be friends because they were rivals in the competition for men's attention. The key to this was the fact that men were generally the mediators of power, therefore to gain access to power, women had to work through men. To maintain their power and influence, it was in men's interest to isolate women and encourage divisions amongst them[434]. Many female authors presented an alternative to such a destructive and negative relationship with other women.

Later in the seventeenth century, Mary Astell, a gentlewoman from Newcastle Upon Tyne, wrote essays that explored the place of women in her society. In her analysis of the writings of Mary Astell, Bridget Hill suggested that Astell's habit of compiling lists of worthy women similar to those of Lanyer was an attempt to prove that women were not inferior to men: 'Glory was no

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[433] Middleton, 'Women Beware Women', Act 5 scene 2 lines 213-217, p.343.

monopoly of the opposite sex'[435]. However, this view of women's citation of their virtuous predecessors as a competition with male writers presents them as purely reactionary and overlooks their wider significance. The acknowledgement of exemplary women was vitally important for their affirmation of the possible. They were presented not only as good or bad role models, but also as representations of the idea of an historical community to support and nurture women. They suggested that women did not exist in a vacuum, but in a tradition of such communities. This recounting of female virtue was also necessary to negate any attempts to deny female solidarity with ideas of distrust and betrayal[436].

In the Preface to her play, *The Northern Heiress*, Mary Davys acknowledged the support and encouragement of women theatre-goers:

> the ladies, in particular, have been pleas'd to favour my first attempt, it will make me more industrious to promote their diversion at a more convenient season[437].

She expressed a desire to reciprocate the goodwill extended towards her play:

> Child, born of a common Woman, has many Fathers, so my poor Offspring has been laid at a great many Doors, who, out of Pity to their own Understandings, has sent the Brat back to its lawful Parent[438].

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[434] *See discussion of Desiradean society, Chapter 2, p.12.*
[435] B. Hill, editor, The First English Feminist, (Aldershot: Gower Publishing, 1986) p.54.
[436] *Ideas about female solidarity are discussed in Chapter 2, p.58.*
[437] Davys, 'The Northern Heiress' in Stephanson, p. 56.
[438] Davys, *'The Northern Heiress', Preface, p. 56.*

The idea that the play was a child rejected by its mythical father emphasised the nurturing and creative role of the women who were 'please'd to favour my first Attempt'. Davys wrote the preface from a position of strength as the play had already proven itself on the stage when it was published: 'The Success it met with the third night, was...infinitely above what I had reason to expect'. It would seem therefore, that the acknowledgement of female support for her work was not an attempt to curry favour, but genuine recognition of the support and encouragement of her female audience.

Davys presented herself as different from the usual London playwright. She described herself as a 'Female Muse, from Northern Clime' who was deficient in the classical education that might have been expected of a writer:

> Learning she 'as none, so can have no Supplies
> From ancient Books, but on her self relies'[439].

While she wrote that men may be kind to her 'out of good Manners' this expectation also suggested that those who criticised her were impolite. However, Davys placed the burden of her obligation on the female members of the audience when she wrote in the Prologue:

> From her own Sex something she may expect;
> 'Tis Women's Duty Women to Protect.

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[439] Davys, 'The Northern Heiress', The Prologue, p .57.

In the world of the theatre, plays were held up to public scrutiny and the reaction of the audience to them determined their worth.

In Davys' *The Northern Heiress*, Isabella discussed the idea that women's worth was gauged by the reaction of men to them. Her suitor, Gamont saw women as predators, and the only reason that Isabella and Louisa went out early in the day was so that they could go 'spreading your nets, that you have met with Game already'[440]. Isabella's assertion that they had been to worship at the Minster was also interpreted as a less than spiritual activity, which prompted Louisa to retort sarcastically:

> the Men say we go to Church for nothing but to pray for Husbands, for ought I know this may have been my critical minute.

In the world of 'The Northern Heiress' women were seen by men as impossible to please unless a financial inducement was involved. The measurement for female worth was the amount of attention paid to them by men. The idea of female communities was to take women out of that sort of hostile and competitive environment and provide different criteria for measuring self-worth. Virtue and spirituality were suggested as the indicators of worth rather than money and appearance. Women were able to achieve subjectivity and independence in the context of an ideal society in which they did not assert identity, but modelled themselves after each other, imitating copies of heavenly

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[440] Davys, 'The Northern Heiress', Act I, p. 60.

originals around them[441]. If there were no positive role models then it would be more difficult for women to aspire to a higher spirituality.

As already mentioned, Mary Davys reversed this message when she wrote in the preface of *The Northern Heiress*: 'Tis Women's Duty Women to Protect'.[442]

Mary Astell wrote extensively on women's role in early modern society. Her proposals for a religious retreat for women were intended to provide an environment for female excellence:

> the Proposal, it is to erect a monastery or... a religious retirement...being not only a retreat from the world, but likewise, an institution...to fit us to do the greatest good in it.[443]

It was not intended to be a prison, or an enclosed convent in the Roman Catholic sense. Women were 'invited into a place where you shall suffer no confinement but to be kept out of the road of sin'. She suggested spinsterhood as a viable alternative to marriage, where retreat into a 'Monastery' would enable single women to learn the skills necessary to re-enter society as educators of the 'Children of Persons of Quality'[444]. In a project with echoes of the work of the IBVM, the purpose of the Astell's community of women was to train unmarried or widowed women to fulfil a role within society and act as supports to the family. *A*

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[441] A. Johns, 'Excited Needles: Theorizing Feminist Utopia in Seventeenth Century England', in Utopian Studies, Volume 7(i) 1996, pp.60-74.
[442] Davys, 'The Northern Heiress' p. 57.
[443] Mary Astell, 'A Serious Proposal to the Ladies' (1696) in Hill, The First English Feminist, p.150.

Serious Proposal was first published in 1694 and ran to four editions. Astell emphasised education as a means of improving thinking and understanding, rather than a method of increasing knowledge.

Mary Astell's 'religious retreat' was suggested as an alternative to marriage for some women and a preparation for marriage or a teaching role for others. The fact that she intended to take women with their own money would mean that they would be taking their resources totally out of the control of mainstream society and denying a man a "good", or in other words, lucrative marriage. It may well have been this aspect of Mary Astell's proposed community that led to its condemnation and her failure to make it a reality. In 1725, Mary Wandesford of York outlined her plans for a very similar institution in her will. She bequeathed:

> the lands, house and mill... my right to a mortgage upon the estate of Jeremiah Myers...for 1200l., and 1200l. part of my stock in the South Sea Company, for the use of ten poor gentlewomen who were never married, and who shall be of the religion which is taught and practised in the Church of England as by law established, who shall retire from the hurry and noise of the world into a religious house or Protestant retirement which shall be provided for them.[445]

The similarities of this proposed establishment to that developed by Mary Astell are striking. Both aimed to provide an exclusively female, contemplative, religious community. That these should be suggested almost two hundred years

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[444] Astell, 'A Serious Proposal to the Ladies', (London: 1696) p. 100.

after the dissolution of the English convents shows the continuing relevance of the idea of female religious life.

There are two main differences between the ideas of Mary Astell and Mary Wandesford. The first is the issue of marriage. While Mary Astell's institution did not discourage marriage and was for some women intended to be a preparation for that life, Mary Wandesford did not provide for women who wanted to marry. Indeed, there was a clause in the conditions laid out in her will to remove any woman who:

> shall marry or behave herselfe unsuitably to the designe and rules of this foundation... and to fill her place with another gentlewoman who may better deserve it[446].

It would seem that for Mary Wandesford, marriage was included in the realms of unsuitable behaviour, rather than being perceived as a positive step which would rescue the women from a life which was regarded as second best. The second major difference was that Mary Wandesford's community gave a home to poor and disadvantaged women. This spiritual community was clearly an alternative to marriage and the family and was designed to provide a place for those women whose single marital status either resulted from, or had resulted in poverty relative to their social standing. Mary Wandesford's concern for

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[445] The will of Mary Wandesford, Nov. 4, 1725, printed in Alice Thornton, Autobiography, p. 323.
[446] Thornton, p. 323.

unmarried women transcended social status however, as she added a codacil to her will requesting that, although she did not wish to have a large funeral:

> 6 of the poorest unmarried women in Kirklington may have white vales from head to foot prepared for them and white gloves, and carry my corps(sic) into the church at what place I happen to be buried in. Let the white vales(sic) be of such cloth as will do them service hereafter.[447]

The service of the women was paid for by the donation of the white veils which presumably would have been put to some other use after the funeral.

It was relatively common for rich women to provide for those less well off by setting up charitable institutions. When she eventually inherited her lands in Cumbria, Lady Anne Clifford completed a project begun by her mother many years previously. She set up St Anne's Almshouses in Appleby which gave a home:

> for the better Relief and further Support of thirteen of such poor and decrepit women inhabiting and dwelling there and in the neighbouring Parts who on account of their great old age and great debility of Body are not able to gain their Food and Clothing by Labor.[448]

There were a number of restrictions on the women and their activities, for example:

> That the outer Doores of the Almeshouse may be constanlie locked up everie night at eight a clock in the Winter and at nine in the Sommer and

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[447] Thornton, p. 324.

[448] St Anne's Almshouses, Appleby, Cumbria, Charter of Incorporation, Charles II (1661), English Translation 18/19C, Kendal Record Office, WD/EC2.

> not be opened in the morneing till seven a clock in the Winter and sixe in the somer.
>
> That none of the Sisters do runne on the Score in the Towne Because they have their Allowance constantlie payed to them before hand.[449]

These restrictions would seem to be aimed at maintaining the reputation of the house and preventing criticism of the project on moral grounds. The price of social support in this case was agreement to the rules of the house, rules which were formally laid out and offered as conditions for a woman's placement in the home.

Although wealthy women in their own right, it seems that Lady Anne Clifford and Mary Wandesford had both recognised the vulnerable position of unmarried or widowed women in their communities, and they set about making some provision for them. The reformation ideal of the family left unmarried women outside of a socially acceptable institution and without a specified role in either church or society. Mary Wandesford appears to have been attempting to create a place for these women, where they could:

> all live together under one roofe, and where they may make a small congregation once at least every day at prayers[450].

The emphasis on religion and piety would have deflected much criticism and the appointment of male trustees would have given the community a respectability

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[449] Orders made by the Countess to be observed in the Almshouses, Kendal Record Office, WD/EC2. The rules of similar institutions can be found in M.L. Kekewich, Princes and Paupers: An Anthology of Primary Sources, (Manchester University Press, 1995).

which could have been lacking if they were seen as 'masterless'. Both Lady Anne Clifford and Mary Wandesford created models of female communities which pragmatically took account of the society in which they lived and therefore ensured their survival in some form to the present day.

Lady Anne Clifford's experience in legal matters ensured that the institution she had set up was able to be maintained after her death. Mary Wandesford's bequest eventually lead to the creation of the 'Old Maid's Hospital' in York. However, Mary Astell's plans for the establishment of a similar institution for pious Protestant women were condemned as being too similar to a nunnery and her ideas never came to fruition[451]. One of the reasons for this may have been that one of the groups of women she targeted were:

> Heiresses and Persons of Fortune [who] may be kept secure from the rude attempts of designing Men; And she who has more Money than Descretion, need not curse her Stars for being expos'd a prey to bold importunate and rapacious Vultures[452].

The protection that Astell offered gave rise to the idea that women may not have to be married at all. The comfort and security of her retreat could have easily been preferable to marriage with a man chosen under strictly proscribed conditions where:

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[450] Thornton, p. 324.
[451] Hill, pp. 107-30.
[452] Hill, p. 165.

> a Woman should not love before marriage, but only make choice of one whom she can love hereafter[453].

Attitudes to women who refused marriage at this time were very hostile and it was considered advantageous for both families to agree a suitable match for their children. Single women with "prospects" or a fortune of their own were extremely vulnerable to the scheming of men with ambition and their families. In *The Northern Heiress,* the heiress of the title was Isabella, whose money had made her the unwilling target of suitors of questionable motives. A discussion between Gamont and Welby underlined the perception of men's preoccupation with the 'value' of single women[454]:

> Gamont: Yes, Welby, I am in Love with an Angelick Woman; but there is 20000l to add to the Charm.
> Welby: What, I warrant the rich Heiress I have heard of.
> Gamont: The same: but methinks you have had early Intelligence, to hear of her so soon.
> Welby: Oh! A great Fortune is like a great Bell; the Sound goes far.[455]

Isabella's distrust of Gamont's motives would appear to have had at least some basis. Although she admitted her attraction to him, she was not convinced of his honesty:

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[453] Hill, p. 165.
[454] It is important to note that the representation of men in Davys' work was generally satirical. The representation of men by a woman author reveals how she sees them, or the way that she wishes to portray them.
[455] Davys, 'The Northern Heiress', Act I p.66.

> Gamont, thy qualifications are without Objection; and could I but perswade myself thy Love was grounded on a generous Basis, not all the Titles in the World should ever have Power to draw me from thee.[456]

Isabella eventually resorted to deceit to test Gamont's feelings for her, by pretending that her money was lost: 'Alderman Brittle in whose Hands my Money is, is broke, and gone off with all.'[457]

It was precisely this sort of situation that Mary Astell's retreat was intended to avoid. She wanted to provide an alternative to taking a chance in ordinary society which left the woman having to become dishonest herself to avoid being the victim of an avaricious suitor. However, the idea of taking eligible women with access to significant sums of money out of general circulation did not win widespread approval. Astell's plans were condemned as being too similar to a nunnery, a powerful criticism in a country which had so recently been subject to instabilities caused by religious conflict. The success of other refuges for women, such as that of Mary Wandesford, and also Lady Anne Clifford's St Anne's Almshouses in Appleby, would appear to rest on the fact that they were intended as charity for the poor and destitute, who were unable, rather than unwilling to support themselves by marriage. The fact that Astell and some of her friends were able to set up a charity school for the daughters of

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[456] Davys, 'The Northern Heiress', Act II p. 81.
[457] Davys, *'The Northern Heiress', Act III*, p. 87.

pensioners of the Chelsea Royal Hospital[458] without any serious opposition would support this analysis.

The association of women and money was a contentious one. Mary Wandesford's project placed men in overall charge of the finances of her 'hospital', thereby giving her community a master. Women in charge of money were often seen as dangerous or scheming by men. Throughout the ages, money equalled power, therefore to give money to women was to give them power and disrupt a gender balance which relied upon male control. In *The Northern Heiress* Davys' heroine, Isabella, had money, and consequently power, that was given to her by her grandmother. As a gift, it allowed her self-determination and actively subverted the patriarchal inheritance system. The transfer of property matrilineally was more common that it would appear. The fact that statutory regulations gave property to the first born son of any marriage led to the assumption that all wealth followed this route. In fact, women were often guaranteed a degree of financial independence by the bequest of money or goods, either in the will of a parent or as gifts while the relative was still alive.

In *The Northern Heiress*, female power was mediated by its relationship with money and women passed on that power to each other. Isabella's money came from her Grandmother. She rewarded her maid, Liddy, in similar terms for

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[458] Hill, p. 11.

her loyal service: 'I am going to present you with a Husband, and 400l a year'[459]. Liddy recognised the worth of access to the man she wanted and also enough money to guarantee her a degree of power in their relationship: 'A very Valuable Present indeed'[460].

One of the other main characters, Lady Greasy, was also financially independent, running her own tallow business. Lady Greasy maintained an air of great authority despite her lack of education, regional accent and her position as a woman working in a dirty and smelly business. She was seen giving orders to others, taking charge of her daughter and, by the end of the play, drawing her daughter's suitor, Captain Tinsel, into the business. Although he was 'a man of as great a Family as any in the Company', she told him he must:

> throw off that tawdry Red Coat, put on an Apron and I'le him take into the Businesse with my self[461].

Her money gave her the power to transcend the boundaries of both gender and social status, while simultaneously protecting the prospects of her daughter.

Lady Greasy's influence was extended by her membership of a female network. Davys provided a delightful scene of informal networking among the mature women in her play:

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[459] Davys, The Northern Heiress, p. 116.
[460] Davys, *The Northern Heiress*, p. 116.
[461] Davys, Northern Heiress, p. 120.

> Lady Ample, Lady Swish, Lady Cordivant, and Lady Greasy, set at Breakfast, with hot Ale, and Ginger, Butter, Rolls, a Huge Cheshire Cheese, and a Plate of drunken Toast, before them[462].

In what was presented as a regular event, the four former Mayor's wives shared breakfast and information. They saw their activities as:

> keeping up an hearty and neighbourly Way among our selves, which keeps us all Friends; for eating, as well as lying together, makes Folks love.[463]

This emphasised the importance of the women's relationships and showed the women's awareness of the value of their meetings.

The male characters in the play viewed these women's gatherings very differently. They appeared to be fearful of the emasculating effect of female power. In some ways the female author's power over the male characters could be seen as very threatening and Davys appeared to have recognised the risks inherent in her characterisation of men. In no other arena at this time would a woman be able to put words in the mouths of men and order their actions. Her male characters reacted to the exhibition of women's networks and potential power by belittling their activities. Sir Jeffrey's analysis of women's socialising was very scathing:

> As soon as the Cloth's taken away, they dispatch a Courier to three or four idlers, like themselves, to make up a Set at Lue, at which, when they

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[462] Davys, *Northern Heiress*, p.73
[463] Davys, 'Northern Heiress', p. 77.

> have lost all their Money and Fall'n out, they begin to dress for the Assembly.[464]

Davys showed her recognition of the difficulties and criticisms women faced when their activities were significant enough to be analysed and judged by men.

In direct opposition to the image of women unable to co-operate and support each other, Davys created a gathering where 'if you introduce Scandal, you invade the rights of the Tea-Table'[465]. Their efforts in trying to keep subjects worthy of discussion refuted the image of women gossiping and attacking each other. It showed the standards that virtuous women had to maintain if they were survive in ordinary society without being corrupted.

The practical arrangements which surrounded the provision of their breakfast raised adverse comment from the male characters in the play. The women took it in turns to visit each other's homes for breakfast, but paid their hostess for their food and drink. After witnessing their organisation, Sir Jeffrey asked:

> A foolish Custom, quotha! Is it your Custom to go to one another's Houses, guzzle five or six Quarts of Ale, and then club round to pay for it?[435]

This system ensured that the women remained equals, as they were not beholden to each other for hospitality. Their debts to each other were minimised

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[464] Davys, 'Northern Heiress', p. 77.

and there was no competition between hostesses. Although an informal arrangement, the women's meetings nevertheless were governed by reciprocity and honour. They had their own accepted rules and regulations, and code of friendship which were acknowledged by them:' if you find Fault with our Proceedings, you must no more be admitted into our Society'[466].

Lady Greasy's character suggested that the domestic could be powerful. The homely setting of the breakfast company belied their influence and the effect of such a cohesive group. The fact that the women were former mayor's wives would indicate a good knowledge of local politics and their first discussion was about the niceties of voting in a local election: 'it's an easier Matter to lose one's customers by refusing a Vote, than to get new ones by giving on't'[467]. Their awareness of the importance of influence in politics and its effect on their wider business interests demonstrated that the view of them as merely 'gossips' was inaccurate.

The importance of the domestic was further emphasised in Act IV when Sir Loobly attacked Lady Greasy. Although Welby, a fit young man, was present, Lady Greasy called out for Joan and Maudlin, her maids, who chased Sir Loobly off with a mop and broom. It is significant that the three women worked together

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[465] Davys, 'Northern Heiress', p. 74.
[466] Davys, 'Northern Heiress', p.79. See Chapter 2 pp.54-58 for further discussion of friendship theories.
[467] Davys, 'Northern Heiress', p.73

to vanquish the unruly man where Lady Greasy alone had struggled. The defeat of a man by the wielding of cleaning implements is suggestive of power within the domestic sphere which could be turned against men who harassed women such as Lady Greasy. They did not resort to the formal legal system, but used their own informal methods of dealing with an undisciplined man.

The basis of the men's trivialisation of women's friendship this texts was their insistence that marriage was the only site for significant human relationships. In *The Northern Heiress*, Davys represented the male characters as totally underestimating the power and strength of female friendships and networks. Sir Jeffrey condemned the gathering of the 'former mayor's wives' as the 'Gossips of York'[468]. He assumed that an 'extraordinary Occasion brought 'em here to Day' and tried to trivialise their relationships. Welby also looked upon friendship as 'a good standby Dish; but it is withal a cold one, which does not suit with the Desires and Wishes of a Lover like me'[469]. Mary Astell, however, considered that 'one considerable cause of the degeneracy of the age was 'the little true friendship that is to be found in it'[470]. The female characters appeared to value their female friendships highly against the duplicity and deceit that they so often found in the men around them. To her friend Louisa's worries that 'the same modish Airs that makes you forget your Love will Obliterate your

[468] Davys, Northern Heiress, Act II, p. 79.
[469] Davys, Northern Heiress, Act IV, p. 101.

Friendship too', Isabella replied that : 'my Friendship's inviolate, and will last me all my Life'[471]. Her choice of 'inviolate' emphasised the non sexual nature of friendship. The use of such strong language to describe friendship leaves no doubt about the importance placed upon it and although the young women were paired off with their suitors at the end of the play, it is clear that the enduring relationships were those between the women.

Conclusion

None of the writers discussed in this chapter aimed to change the whole of society. They did not have a grand vision of a different world for women. What they tried to do was to expand the lives and thoughts of the women exposed to their writings about their networks and communities so that they could cope well with the challenges of a male-dominated society. Their writings provided theoretical examples of the possibilities for women at this time. The utopias they imagined were modest in their ambitions and relatively realistic in their aims. They all began with the idea that any ideal society consisted of human relationships, intersected by social and political power[472]. The formation of informal networks and recognisable communities worked on similar principles: from Christine de Pisan onwards, women writers tried to suggest ways in which

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[470] Hill, p. 12.
[471] Davys, 'Northern Heiress', Act V, p.114

women could function more effectively and more honestly in the societies in which they found themselves. A common theme in their work was the idea that women were inherently virtuous but were corrupted by living in a society which did not cater for their needs. Patriarchal society was viewed as a negative influence on the morals of women.

Thus, Mary Astell aimed her 'retreat' at cultured and sophisticated women from the London circles of her experience. Mary Davys wrote about a provincial city and women of moderate social status. She focused on the everyday and unremarkable lives of women in a domestic setting and highlighted men's fear of ravishment from female power. Mary Wandesford's Will outlined a home for impoverished and destitute women in her own community who were not fortunate enough to share her advantages.

The authors all identified a need for a community where women were able to connect with each other for the good of all. They recognised that the men within their societies would not provide this space. The writers accepted the responsibility of women to create an environment in which women could flourish and prosper, the most important element of which was women's duty to support and encourage each other: 'Tis Women's Duty Women to Protect'.

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[472] Johns, p.61.

Chapter 7
Conclusion

This thesis has provided a functional, descriptive and developmental analysis of a range of women's networks in early modern northern England. It has examined a number of different networks to demonstrate the variety of organisational structures and the way in which they related to other social organisations of this period.

The theories outlined in Chapter 2 have formed the basis for this discussion, in particular, where the networks fitted into the idea of the formal or informal society. The personal networks of Alice Thornton and Lady Anne Clifford were informal by nature. The organisational framework of these networks was based on social codes of reciprocity, exchange and honour. Although these were not stated by the members of the network, all of those included in the networks understood the unwritten rules and abided by them. The 'incident' related by Alice Thornton demonstrated clearly the behaviour that was expected of network members and the consequences of deviation from this code of conduct.

The IBVM began as a group of women drawn from an informal network, but was quickly formalised by the definition of its aims and objectives in an

official document. However, although the expressed desire of the women of the IBVM was to form an officially recognised order for Roman Catholic women in England, the political circumstances of the early seventeenth century meant that this was impossible. Therefore, the only way to continue with their work was to use informal systems. The conflict between the Protestant and Catholic churches throughout Europe in the seventeenth century led to a close definition of each religion and the role of women within the church. This significantly reduced the options for Catholic women and the IBVM found their activities fell outside of the role deemed acceptable by the church hierarchy at the time. The aims of the women themselves did not change significantly but the definition of what could be included in the formal church organisation was altered causing the IBVM to remain on the margins of the informal/formal system. This had a detrimental effect on the organisation as its high profile in the community meant that it suffered from persecution. If the women had been content to work informally, as had many generations of Catholic wives and mothers before them, their organisation would have been more likely to have escaped censure. Their insistence on being formally organised on a par with the Society of Jesus meant that they provided a direct challenge to the church which had outlawed an uncloistered life for its religious women. Therefore throughout the first fifty years of their existence, the IBVM vacillated between being placed in the informal or

formal system. The persecution of Catholics in England ensured that they always acted informally in their own country.

Quaker Women's Meetings were called into existence by the some of the most influential members of the national organisation. However, as with the IBVM the women themselves were already members of informal networks. This formalisation of existing women's networks did not appear to affect their function, but it would seem to have marginalised the role of women within the organisation as a whole. The need for women's meetings to be separate came from the closer definition of the Society of Friends in response to persecution. Persecution caused both the Catholic Church and the Society of Friends to provide a role for women which was closely circumscribed to demonstrate to their detractors that the women, with their widely accepted potential for disorder, were under control.

In their writing, female authors proposed and depicted women's networks across formal and informal boundaries. Christine de Pisan's fictional City of Ladies used influence and negotiation to help the cause of women. Mary Davys' interpretation of the activities of women in York included an informal network of businesswomen who were well aware of their ability to affect others in the city. Mary Astell proposed a formally organised retreat for women as an alternative to marriage, and Mary Wandesford and Lady Anne Clifford both created societies

for women that acted as a safety net for women whose needs were not met by other formal structures.

Formal women's networks were generally larger in size than informal ones. An effective informal network would appear to contain six to eight members. When Alice Thornton was threatened by external circumstances in 1643 her network of three women was too small to provide effective support, particularly as the ties to one of the women were not strong. In 1662, at the birth of her son Robert a larger, more robust network helped her to cope with a difficult situation more easily. Although the IBVM was a relatively large organisation, the women involved in its management remained fairly constant in number. There were eight founder members in 1609 and at Mary Ward's death in 1642 the eight women present were not only a strong support network for each other, but also the main organisers of the institute.

It would seem that the age of the women in these networks was not particularly significant. In all of the networks studied, the age range was relatively wide and often included women of more than one generation. In fact this would appear to have given the groups strength, as they were able to pass on skills and information to each other and the experience of the older women was recognised and valued by younger women. The greater life experience of widows and those beyond childbearing age was emphasised in literature such as

The Northern Heiress where Lady Greasy and her friends wielded considerable political and economic power.

The marital status of network members affected members more. While marriage could provide a degree of stability and security in a woman's life, this was by no means guaranteed. Alice Thornton blamed her husband for the family's financial difficulties and her apparent wifely devotion is undermined by accounts of his weakness and threats. Women who were single by choice or circumstance seem to have escaped many of the dilemmas faced by those with husbands to consider. The women of the IBVM chose to remain single not because they thought marriage was wrong, but because they would be able to achieve more if they dedicated their lives to their work. Quaker women were generally married or widowed and their documents detail the difficulties they had to contend with when balancing duty to God with their duties as wives and mothers. It would seem that one of the benefits of a wide age range within women's networks was the availability of women either pre or post marriage who could help and support those with competing demands on their time and energy.

Social status was significant to the composition of women's networks, but it cannot be seen as a primary indicator of their make-up. Although many of the women had a similar background, whether this was wealthy or poor, this was not a predetermining factor of their inclusion. Alice Thornton's network included her

maid, Daphne and also women of higher social status than herself. The Quaker women's meetings included women of varying backgrounds and social positions. The majority of women's networks were likely to have contained women of similar social status however, because they would have been the women they came into contact with in their day to day lives. The use of reciprocity as a tool in maintaining relationships would also mean that if one woman was less able to repay a 'debt' accrued within a relationship, then ill feeling may have resulted. However, as Alice Thornton demonstrated, the debt may not always have been material. Her relationship with Mary Danby deteriorated only when Mrs Danby failed to show the requisite loyalty to Alice Thornton as her host and supporter.

Religion can be seen as the one essential factor that either united or divided women in England throughout the early modern period. All of the networks in this study consisted of women from a single religion. In fact religion was often the common bond that held the network together against fierce opposition. A shared culture, history and belief systems were the basis for many of the women's connections, particularly those who belonged to a faith outside of the mainstream. It is unusual to find women at this time whose relationships spanned differing religious beliefs. The place of religion at the centre of public life in England during the seventeenth century and the close definition of each version of Christianity meant that it would have been difficult for women to have

a relationship that did not confront differing beliefs. Although it would be presumptive to assume that women's networks never embraced different religious beliefs, the polarisation of opinion caused by religious conflict in the seventeenth century led to a cultural divide that would appear to have reduced the opportunities for women to join together despite their religious differences.

This would suggest that women's networks at his time were often based on common interests or issues. The examples discussed in this research certainly identify religion as a strong bond, particularly when the religion was newly founded or prohibited in some way. The women of the Society of Friends and the IBVM found strength in standing together against those who tried to persecute them for their beliefs. Alice Thornton expressed fears and concerns about being part of a minority Protestant community when she moved to rural Yorkshire and she formed a network that gave her support from Protestant women with a similar life experience to her own. There appears to be less evidence of women coming together purely on a single issue, however. Houlbrooke's study of female rioters[473] looks at the reasons behind such extreme action and it could be suggested that the women in these cases were drawn to act by their shared agenda. However, it would appear that they were using networks that were already in existence. Their actions were relatively spontaneous and without previous connections to each other it is unlikely that

the women would have been able to act in such an organised way. The first Quaker women's meetings in London would also seem to draw on existing informal networks because of the speed of their reaction to a call for help[474]. The networks often become visible because of their actions or reaction to an event or situation, but their members have not been found to be strangers who collaborated on one issue alone. They were much more likely to be known to each other informally because of a shared background, culture or religion and were able to respond quickly in times of crisis because of existing bonds.

Women's awareness of their networks as a means of effecting change in their societies would appear to vary depending on the type of network involved. Formally organised networks were very obviously recognised by their members and they had a specific purpose, therefore their members can be said to be conscious of their potential. Informal networks were less easily defined and they changed depending on the needs of the women involved. Women were certainly aware of who they could go to for help, advice and assistance and this would generally be the members of their networks. Alice Thornton regularly turned to her female friends and supporters and Lady Anne Clifford's experiences at Court showed her that those she could rely on were the women who used informal social methods to wield unofficial power. They would appear to be aware of their

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[473] Houlbrooke, as cited.

potential when acting together, but they were also very conscious of the dangers they faced and the limits of their actions. Opposition to the activities of women's networks elicited a number of responses. In general, opposition increased feelings of solidarity and had the effect of strengthening the group or network. If a formally organised group faced severe persecution it may have changed its structure to use informal organisational methods to enable it to remain active. Although opposition to women's activities in the seventeenth century often took the form of harsh and unpleasant punishments the flexibility of women's networks meant that they were able to circumvent and sometimes actively subvert the measures taken to keep them in "their place". They became formally organised and recognised in some instances, but in most cases this would seem to be a formalisation of already existing networks.

The benefits of being part of a women's network were emotional, practical and psychological support with the attendant financial and mental health benefits that such support might bring. The women of the Society of Friends and IBVM also hoped that they would be able to change their societies by their actions and example. The women at the Court of James I used their influence and connections to try to prevent a restriction of their activities and can be seen to act as a moderating force in a time of great political change. For many poorer

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[474] I. L. Edwards, 'The Women Friends of London: The Two Weeks and Box Meetings', Journal of the Friends Historical Society, no. 47 1955, p3.

women, these networks prevented absolute destitution. The collections of Quaker women's meetings for needy women in their own communities maintained them at a subsistence level, while Lady Anne Clifford and Mary Wandesford's charitable actions provided a home for those women who were unable to support themselves.

The weaknesses of women's networks were dependent on whether they were organised formally or informally. The formal networks had the advantage of being recognisable and officially recognised by society. However, this was also their biggest disadvantage because they could then be persecuted, denigrated, attacked and made illegal. The laying down of objectives, rules and regulations meant that they lost the flexibility that was so effective in supporting women in differing situations. Informal networks were adaptable and individual to the women themselves. Their rules were social codes subject to interpretation and therefore vulnerable to misunderstanding. Conflict occurred between network members when rules were broken, or the network was threatened. Alice Thornton's disagreement with Mary Danby concerned a challenge to her reputation that necessitated the re-establishment of network ties. Alice Thornton wrote to her network not only to give her own account of the incident, but also to try to gauge which of her friends still supported her. The issue of her daughter's wedding created a more complex dilemma, as young Alice's network contained

many women who were also close to her mother. The co-ordinated response of the women, to ostracise Alice senior and refuse to attend the wedding, can be seen as an example of social pressure being the cost of social support. Conflict within a network would appear to result in an attempt to reassert conformity on the group. This can also be seen in the minutes of the Quaker Women's meetings where efforts were made to persuade a member to stop seeing a man who was not a 'friend'[475].

One of the most significant disadvantages of informal networks has emerged as a theme throughout this thesis. The use of informal methods by women to achieve their aims in a society where power structures were weighted against them meant that to a certain extent they had to use manipulation, subversion and deceit. For many women this was viewed as an unacceptable loss of virtue. Mary Astell's retreat for women was suggested as a way to take women out of a society that gave them so little alternative to deception. Lanyer's poem mourns the loss of a female idyll where women were not in a position to have to compromise their virtue to survive. However, these women challenged the idea that they were naturally inclined towards weakness. They saw male society as the corrupting force, with women's withdrawal from it as their best chance of maintaining their virtue. Independent wealth was closely linked to women making choices based on what was right and many women attempted to

[475] Chapter 5, p. 170.

create a system of gifts and bequests to counter the negative effect of patrimony on their lives.

This thesis has looked at networks that have women only as members. Further work needs to be done to see if networks including both genders work differently and still meet the needs of the women within them. It would seem unlikely that this would be the case unless the men included are also marginalised in some way. In organisations that were persecuted by society such as the Society of Friends women did not remain (or even begin) on equal terms. As the organisation developed they were again pushed towards the margins and excluded from playing a formal part in its management.

This research questions whether it is acceptable for historians to rely on easily recognisable social institutions for data about seventeenth-century women's lives when they were officially and culturally excluded from so many activities. Official statutes and records do not uncover the degree of female influence and involvement in public life because they record only formal activity and women were more often to be found working in an informal way. The study of women's networks reveals a wealth of material, showing that parallel power structures were in existence and were used by women to good effect. Although it is not suggested that these replaced equality in the eyes of the law and society, the creation, use and participation of women in their networks went some way to

negate their exclusion from much of mainstream politics and culture. It also shows that these women were actively engaged in the management of their families and communities. The importance of women's networks to their members cannot be understated. In situations where women were legally and culturally discriminated against they relied on their networks to prevent marginalisation. They were also able to exert pressure and influence on the members of the network to attempt to modify actions or change behaviour. Extra-domestic ties with other women were, and are, an important source of power and value for women. Their strengths and weaknesses are determined by the very flexibility and imagination of their members in being able to create a network structure that could accommodate their needs and desires, whilst also being able to function in early modern society. The importance of women's networks to their members cannot be understated. In situations where women were legally and culturally discriminated against they relied on their networks to prevent marginalisation. They were also able to exert pressure and influence on the members of the network to attempt to modify actions or change behaviour. Extra-domestic ties with other women were, and are, an important source of power and value for women. Their strengths and weaknesses are determined by the very flexibility and imagination of their members in being able to create a network

structure that could accommodate their needs and desires, whilst also being able to function in early modern society.

Women's Networks in Northern England 1600-1725

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Abbreviations

BL British Library
BC Bar Convent
EEB Early English Books 1640-1700
EB English Books before 1640
FL Society of Friends Library
KRO Kendal Record Office
MF Microfilm
PMLA Periodical of the Modern Language Society of America
TT Thomason Tracts
T&W Tyne and Wear Archives
WI Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine
Wing Wing, Donald, Short Title Catalogue of Books 1641-1700,(New York: 1945-51)

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Northumberland Quarterly Women's Meeting	T&W MF218
Sufferings of Friends 1660-1766	T&W MF125
Sufferings from 1600-1660	T&W MF215
Newcastle Friends Burials 1660-1776	T&W MF214
Monthly Meetings, Register of Births and Deaths, etc.	T&W MF176
Minutes of Newcastle Women's Meetings 1693-1725	T&W MF181
Newcastle Monthly Meeting, Minutes and Certificates for Travelling Ministers	T&W MF188
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